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XI'S VISION | GLOBAL CIVILIZATION INITIATIVE

Nation makes big strides in archaeology

Outcomes follow president's call for further insights on Chinese civilization

By WANG KAIHAO
wangkaihao@chinadaily.com.cn

Chinese research on ancient civilization has made remarkable progress in the past year, since President Xi Jinping called for further efforts to advance the study of Chinese civilization.

While presiding over a group study session on May 27 last year of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China Central Committee on a national-level, decadeslong research program that traces the origins of Chinese civilization, Xi called on academics to forge ahead and make full use of the fruits of the program, which demonstrates China's 5,000-year history through abundant archaeological discoveries and findings.

Xi, who is also general secretary of the CPC Central Committee and chairman of the Central Military Commission, emphasized that more achievements in the field can help the nation strengthen cultural confidence and stick to the path of socialism with Chinese characteristics, while exploring and explaining how a sense of community among the Chinese people was developed, and how Chinese of various ethnic groups are united in diversity.

The program, involving about 400 scholars across the country, was launched in 2002 and mainly focuses on key sites, mostly between 3500 and 1500 BC.

"We have had many outcomes, but our understanding of a clear development path of civilization still needs exploration at a deeper level," said Wang Wei, director of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences' Academic Division of History, who delivered a lecture during the 2022 group study. "We have to eye more areas and expand relevant comparative studies to a much wider time span to look for the roots and key ingredients of a civilization."

In the past year, Chinese researchers have lived up to Xi's expectations and yielded new findings in the field.

Earlier this month, in Zhengzhou, Henan province, the country's leading scholars gathered at a forum to report recent discoveries covering a long span of time.

At the 10,000-year-old Sitai site in Shangyi county, Hebei province, archaeologists unearthed ruins of six semi-basement dwellings, which are believed to be the earliest known "houses" in China.

The discovery "provided crucial materials for the study of key issues, including Chinese cultural lineage, human migrations and the origins of agriculture," said Zhao Zhanhu, a researcher at the Hebei Institute of Cultural Relics and Archaeology.

In Hanshan county, Anhui province, archaeologists recently found massive ruins of a group of buildings at the Lingjiatan site, which dates to between 5,300 and 5,800 years ago. More findings of jade artifacts and sites for major sacrificial ceremonies have enabled people to learn about a prehistoric ritual system and complicated society.

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Biden, Republicans reach debt-ceiling deal

By AI HEPING in New York
aiheping@chinadailyusa.com

United States President Joe Biden and House Speaker Kevin McCarthy have reached an "agreement in principle" to raise the nation's legal debt ceiling to avert a possible default amid a deep partisan divide and global concerns.

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Now Congress must rush to approve the spending cuts package in a matter of days to avert a potentially disastrous US default.

The agreement risks angering both Democratic and Republican sides as lawmakers on Sunday began to unpack the concessions made. Negotiators agreed to some Republican demands for increased work requirements for recipients of food stamps that had sparked an uproar from House Democrats as a nonstarter. But they stopped short of greater overall spending cuts that Republicans wanted.

Support from both parties will be needed to win congressional approval before a projected June 5 government default on US debts.

The president, a Democrat, and the speaker, a Republican, reached the agreement after the two spoke on Saturday evening by phone.

"The agreement represents a compromise, which means not everyone gets what they want," Biden said in a statement late on Saturday night. "That's the responsibility of governing," he said.

Biden called the agreement "good news" for the people of the US "because it prevents what could have been a catastrophic default and would have led to an economic recession, retirement accounts devastated and millions of jobs lost".

McCarthy said in brief remarks at the Capitol that "we still have a lot of work to do".

With the outlines of a deal in place, the legislative package could be drafted and shared with lawmakers in time for a House vote as soon as Wednesday, and later next week in the Senate.

Central to the package is a budget deal that would hold spending flat for 2024 and increasing it by 1 percent for 2025 in exchange for raising the debt limit for two years.

The debt ceiling has been modified 102 times since World War II, according to the US Congressional Research Service.

Agencies contributed to this story.

Xi's books on sci-tech self-reliance, socialism released

A compilation of discourses by Xi Jinping, general secretary of the Communist Party of China Central Committee, on self-reliance and strength in science and technology has been published by the Central Party Literature Press.

The book, compiled by the Institute of Party History and Literature of the CPC Central Committee, contains 50 relevant discourses by Xi, some of which were published for the first time. The book is now available nationwide.

Since the 18th CPC National Congress in 2012, the CPC Central Committee with Comrade Xi Jinping at its core has attached great importance to sci-tech innovation, leading to historic achievements and changes in China's scientific and technological undertakings.

Xi's discourses in this regard systematically expounded on the strategic objectives, key tasks, major measures and basic requirements for promoting the country's sci-tech innovation. They are of great guiding significance for turning China into a sci-tech powerhouse, boosting its high-level self-reliance and strength in science and technology, and promoting its high-quality development.

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The C919, China's first self-developed large passenger aircraft, is greeted on Sunday by a water salute at Beijing Capital International Airport after it flew in from Shanghai, completing its debut commercial flight. WANG YANG / FOR CHINA DAILY

C919 jetliner completes debut commercial flight

By WANG YING in Shanghai
wang_ying@chinadaily.com.cn

China's first self-developed narrow-body jet, the C919, successfully completed its maiden commercial flight on Sunday, ushering in a new era of aviation that utilizes domestically manufactured aircraft, industry experts said.

Some 130 passengers traveled on China Eastern Airlines flight MU 9191, which departed Shanghai Hongqiao International Airport at 10:32 am. The plane landed at Beijing Capital International Airport at 12:31 pm, and was welcomed with a traditional water salute.

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"Sitting in the China-made passenger aircraft C919, I felt extremely excited and proud," Zhang Keli, a passenger from Beihang University in Beijing, said when she shared her memorable experience with People's Daily.

"Both the take-off and landing were as smooth as wide-body aircraft, and the whole flying process is terrific. The cabin is quieter than traditional narrow-body jets," Zhang said.

Wu Guanghui, head designer of the C919 and chief scientist at Commercial Aircraft Corp of China, said the commercial flight was the fulfillment of a dream. "COMAC will work on delivery of more jets to our clients to ensure more people can take our homegrown aircraft," he was quoted as saying by Beijing News.

Zhong Wen, a cabin services manager with China Eastern Airlines, displays a boarding pass marking the C919's first flight.
YIN LIQIN / CHINA NEWS SERVICE

The C919 flight on Sunday had a configuration of 164 seats, including eight in business class and 156 in economy class.

Lin Zhijie, an aviation industry analyst, said the C919 is offering a new option in the global aircraft market. "The jet is comparable to the Airbus A320 and the Boeing B737 series and is expected to break the duopoly of Boeing and Airbus, which will help promote benign competition and the healthy development of the world's civil aviation market," Lin said.

The first C919 aircraft was delivered to China Eastern Airlines in Shanghai on Dec 9, 2022, by its manufacturer. The C919 made its first experimental flight in 2017.

Before the jet's debut commercial flight, China Eastern Airlines completed all test flights, passenger operations' verifications and other preparatory work required before commencing commercial operations, the airline said.

The Civil Aviation Administration of China, which authorized and inspected all the results of the tests and verification procedures, confirmed that China Eastern was capable of operating C919 aircraft safely, and approved commercial operation of the jet.

"With the commercial operation and the delivery of more C919 jets, the homegrown aircraft is hoped to drive the development of the aircraft manufacturing industrial chain," said Lin, who is a columnist at one of China's biggest civil aviation websites carnoc.com.

The aircraft flew back to Shanghai from Beijing Capital International Airport on Sunday afternoon.

Qi Qi, an associate professor at Guangzhou Civil Aviation College, said the C919 is tasked with transportation of passengers, luggage, cargo and mail, while also bringing economic benefits to the airline company.

The first C919 aircraft will be put into commercial operation on a regular basis between Shanghai Hongqiao International Airport and Chengdu Tianfu International Airport in Sichuan province. With the delivery of more C919 aircraft, the carrier plans to gradually expand its commercial services to more Chinese cities.

A second C919 jet is scheduled to be delivered in mid-June. China Eastern will receive a total of three C919 aircraft over the next two years, according to Xinhua News Agency.

From Friday, passengers were able to book tickets for C919 flights between Shanghai and Chengdu, with the first flight scheduled to depart Shanghai on Monday, according to aviation data and solution service provider VariFlight.

LIVE SHOWS RETURN TO OVERWHELMING RESPONSE 3 YEARS ON

Scalpers send ticket prices soaring, authorities move to regulate sales

By CHEN NAN
chennan@chinadaily.com.cn

Fans flocked to the National Stadium, also known as the Bird's Nest, on Friday for the first concert of Taiwan rock band Mayday's tour stop in Beijing.

They arrived at the stadium — the main venue for the Summer Olympics in 2008 — two hours ahead of the performance.

Those without seats found another way to celebrate the return of the band to the capital city — by singing along in the area outside the stadium.

Ashin, the band's lead vocalist, said during the concert: "I knew that there are many fans outside who couldn't enjoy the concert with us in the venue. When we performed here last time, we never expected we would have to wait more than 1,000 days to return and meet you again."

"Let's be quiet for a second to listen to their voices," he said referring to the supporters outside.

On May 9, fans flocked to buy tickets for the band's six concerts in Beijing, which sold out within seconds, with 40,000 bought for each performance.

Those who successfully purchased tickets shared their excitement on social media platforms.

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Tickets: Fans query registration system

All 40,000 tickets for Taiwan band Mayday's concert at the National Stadium in Beijing on Friday sold out within seconds. PHOTOS BY LI ZHIZHANG / FOR CHINA DAILY

Top and above: Fans without tickets stage a sing-along outside the National Stadium during Mayday's concert on Saturday, the second of the band's tour in Beijing. PHOTOS BY WEI XIAOHAO /CHINA DAILY

Top: Fans hold images of Mayday members outside the National Stadium on Saturday. **Above:** Those without tickets enjoy the concert outside the venue as night falls. PHOTOS BY WEI XIAOHAO /CHINA DAILY

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One fan, nicknamed Beibei, who traveled with three friends from Chengdu, Sichuan province, to attend a Mayday concert for the fifth time said: "I have watched the band's performances since I was 18. I've had lots of fun and have beautiful memories of the concerts.

"It's like meeting an old friend, and it's hard to describe the excitement, especially after such a long time without watching their performances."

Beibei and her friends waited for an hour before the ticket sales opened.

"My heart was beating very hard and my palms were wet. The moment I bought the ticket, I screamed in delight. However, one of my friends didn't get a ticket," she said.

After Beijing, Mayday will hold concerts in other Chinese cities this year, including Wuhan, Hubei province, Quanzhou, Fujian province, and Chongqing.

In 1997, Mayday started out as a school band in Taiwan, and has since received four Best Band accolades at the Golden Melody Awards.

The group comprises five members — lead vocalist and songwriter Chen Shin-hung, better known as Ashin among his fans, guitarists Wen Shang-yi, or Monster, and Shi Chin-hang, or Stone, bassist Tsai Shen-yen, or Masa, and drummer Liu Yen-ming, nicknamed Guan You.

The band has won a large fan base with its original songs, including *Stubborn*, *Suddenly I Miss You* and *Love-Ing*, which are mostly themed around love, brotherhood and friendship. It continues to attract many fans who are considerably younger than the band members.

On April 29, 2012, Mayday staged its first concert at the National Stadium, which sold out within minutes.

Since then, the band has performed numerous concerts at the iconic venue. For most of the songs, fans stand up, frantically waving wands. However, for the past three years, like many other bands, Mayday had to postpone performances due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

That night in 2012, Ashin, who took off his shoes, asked the audience: "How long does it take you to get to the National Stadium? For some, it may be 20 minutes, while for others, it may be two hours. I know that many people have traveled from far away, but I want to tell you that it took Mayday 13 years to come here and perform."

First show

Mayday gave its first show in Beijing in 2004. Performing at a small live house venue, Wu Ming Gao Di, or Nameless High Place, the group shared the stage with local bands such as Joyside. About 30 people watched the show, paying 30 yuan each for a ticket.

On May 31, 2020, the band gave a live performance at an empty Taipei Municipal Stadium, where it held its first major concert in 1999, which attracted more than 10,000 fans. The one-hour live online concert attracted over 35 million views.

After the latest Beijing concerts were announced on May 5, Ashin posted on his Sina Weibo account, which has more than 23 million followers: "We will return to Beijing and meet you again. We can never sense this meeting without the meeting really happening. Luckily, it will happen soon."

On May 21, with the much-anticipated concerts just days away, the official social media platform of Beijing Olympic Park, which is home to the stadium, announced that a total audience of about 260,000 would attend the six Mayday concerts.

The announcement said: "Mayday's six concerts will be the first large-scale events held at the National Stadium after the country optimized its COVID-19 control measures. The Beijing Olympic Park management committee is committed to strengthening the security plan and is prepared to manage large crowds."

However, overwhelming demand jammed the Damai ticketing site, with countless infuriated fans unable to buy tickets. They lodged complaints on social media about the site failing to load, and said the platform did not allow them access to tickets, which allowed scalpers to cash in.

Members of Mayday's fan club were left disappointed, as the service for group tickets shut down suddenly. This resulted in fans trying to buy tickets from scalpers for high prices.

Scalpers asked 880 yuan ($125) for the cheapest tickets, priced at 355 yuan. The most expensive, costing 1,855 yuan, were offered for 2,780 yuan.

After failing to buy a ticket for the Beijing concerts, one fan posted on social media: "Only a small number of other bands in the country generate the same excitement as Mayday. People travel from different parts of the country to see the band because it's worth it. I will be very upset if I miss their concerts this year."

Hua Yue Fei Fan, a concert-organizing company based in Beijing, said in a statement: "As a co-organizer of Mayday's concerts for the past 16 years, we are honored to work with the band again. To protect the industry and combat ticket scalping, we decided to have three official sites to sell our available tickets."

While scalping is nothing new, it has witnessed a resurgence following the optimized COVID-19 control measures and the resumption of ticketed events. For example, on May 20, pop stars, including Zhang Jie, Mao Buyi and Jeff Chang, held concerts in different cities nationwide.

Furthermore, with the popularity of social media platforms, scalpers have more ways to acquire tickets for resale ahead of major concerts, such as selling them on e-commerce platforms or even on WeChat.

One scalper told The Beijing News that automated software is used by scalpers to buy tickets in large quantities. In this way, they obtain tickets for resale more quickly than individuals.

China Youth Daily reported that organizers of some events even view scalpers as secondary ticket agents by often reserving a proportion of tickets for scalpers. The report quoted a scalper as saying that organizers reserve tickets in some areas of venues, such as grandstand or front row seats, which the scalpers can buy and resell at higher prices.

Group's response

Fans' complaints on social media platforms drew the attention of local authorities in Beijing, who formed a work group to combat scalping.

The China Association of Performing Arts said the work group aims to respond to scalping by managing the origin of tickets and regulating sales based on a real-name system, as well as investigating scalpers online and at venues.

A statement from the association said: "If scalpers get their hands on tickets for popular concerts, prices could rise to an extreme level, and fans will not be able to afford them. By requiring real-name registration, we can prevent bots from automatically buying tickets, thus giving people who genuinely want to go to a concert a chance."

On May 15, some 20 scalpers were caught before concerts staged by pop stars Han Hong and Richie Jen in Beijing. The punishment for scalpers includes a fine of 500 yuan to 1,000 yuan and detention of five to 15 days.

However, some fans complaining about the real-name registration system for concerts said it is "essentially impossible and impractical".

On May 7, when organizers announced the ticket return rules for Taiwan pop singer Rene Liu's concerts in Shanghai six days later, many people rushed to sites to return tickets, as the rules stated they could only be returned from 9 am to 9 pm that day.

A similar situation occurred when organizers of Malaysian pop star Fish Leong's concerts in Shanghai on May 20 and 21 limited the return time for tickets to within 24 hours of them being bought. Fans could also return tickets 48 hours before the concert started, but this required 20 percent of the ticket price to be paid as a service charge.

A fan wishing to be named only as Kaka, who bought tickets for Liu's concerts in Shanghai, said: "I bought them for myself and my best friend, hoping to surprise her. However, the real-name system meant that I either return the tickets within 12 hours or had to ask my friend for her ID card to buy a new ticket.

"The idea behind real-name registration sounds good at first, but when you look at it further, there are too many difficulties that need to be sorted out. Many situations could lead to buyers failing to attend concerts. What if a buyer had an emergency and couldn't make it to the performance?

"Real-name verification is totally understandable as a way to combat ticket scalpers. Concert organizers require prospective buyers to register using their real names because of the overwhelming demand for tickets. However, the market response for every show varies."

Live performances are returning faster than expected. In February, the Ministry of Culture and Tourism announced the resumption of approvals for commercial performance applications involving people from Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan, allowing more artists to hold concerts on the Chinese mainland.

Many artists, including Taiwan pop icon Jay Chou, Mayday and pop stars Li Yuchun and Xue Zhiqian, have announced their tour schedules.

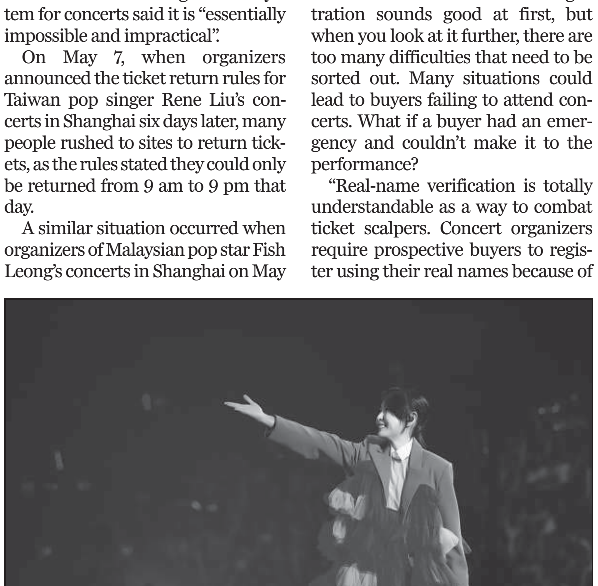
Events professionals see the number of events and attendances reaching and potentially surpassing the pre-pandemic levels of 2019. Many people are eager to attend music festivals, concerts and other events they have been missing for the past three years.

Zhao Zhian, deputy director of Communication University of China's School of Music and Recording Arts, said: "Many concerts and outdoor music festivals have been announced since January, marking the return of the live music scene in China after the pandemic. It looks as though people are doing their best to make up for lost time."

Also head of the university's music industry research center, Zhao led his team's work on the annual music report released by the center during the 8th Music Industry Forum 2023 on May 19 in Beijing. The forum was co-organized by the university.

The report said the total size of China's music industry in 2021 exceeded 378 billion yuan, representing year-on-year growth of more than 8 percent and a return to the level reached in 2019.

Zhao said, "The performing arts sector related to music reached 11.8 billion yuan in 2021, a rise of 47 percent compared with 2020. The number will hit a record this year."



Left: Pop star Li Yuchun announces tour schedules for her upcoming concerts nationwide. **Right:** Taiwan singer Rene Liu performs during a concert in Shenzhen, Guangdong province, last month. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

TOP NEWS

Project: Findings present 'rich cultural legacies'

From page 1

Archaeologists working at the Nanzuo site in Qingyang, Gansu province, unearthed the ruins of a huge "palatial city" dating back 4,700 to 5,200 years. The ruins provided insights into a hub of power on the edge of China's Loess Plateau.

Meanwhile, findings at the Bicun site in Lyuliang, Shanxi province — stone fortress ruins dating back between 3,800 and 4,200 years — have marked the frontier of a regional power, and they might have unveiled only the tip of a complicated defensive system.

"These discoveries have presented different formats and the rich cultural legacies of the infancy of Chinese civilization," said Chen Xingcan, director of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences' Institute of Archaeology. "The findings, in pivotal locations and crucial eras, jointly portray a brilliant picture of how a united community emerged amid the diversity."

After long-term communication among different regions, the Erlitou site, a cultural core, appeared in present-day Henan province, absorbing various advanced elements of civilization. It was generally considered the capital of the Xia Dynasty (c.21st century-16th century BC), the first central dynasty recorded in Chinese history.

In March, the crisscrossing road network near the site's palace area was listed among China's top 10 archaeological discoveries of 2022.

The governance system of a central dynasty was further consolidated during the following Shang Dynasty (c.16th century-11th century BC), as demonstrated by the Yinxu Ruins site in Anyang, Henan. New findings at the royal mausoleum of Yinxu were also on last year's list of top 10 findings.

The site, the Shang capital during its late period, is also home to 3,300-year-old oracle bone inscriptions, the earliest known, fully developed Chinese writing system, whose lineage is the same as the Chinese characters used today.

President Xi visited the site in October. He said the Chinese characters are extraordinary and play an important role in the formation and development of the Chinese nation, and he recognized the archaeologists for having done a great job in this regard.

To that end, the Palace Museum in Beijing announced on May 22 the publication of its first two volumes of the book *Yinxu Oracle Bone Inscriptions in Palace Museum Collection*.

"Despite researchers' lasting devotion to academic studies, more effort is still expected in order to promote our findings among the public," said Wang Xudong, director of the Palace Museum. "We can only deepen people's understanding on the ordered lineage of our civilization through more creative ways of revitalizing the relics."

Wang Wei, from the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, said that more publicity of recent academic achievements is conducive to the origin-tracing program.

To that end, he and several other scholars are set to participate in the production of the second season of *City of Museums*, a popular reality show from Beijing TV. Tracing the origins of Chinese civilization will be the theme of the new season, which will premiere in early June.

The origin-tracing program not only seeks to engage the public, but also looks to a global horizon.

In recent years, Chinese archaeologists have embarked on journeys overseas to the core areas of the world's main ancient civilizations, thus developing a more complete understanding of the concept of civilization.

For example, in Luxor, Egypt, Chinese archaeologists made excavations at the Temple of Montu site from the New Kingdom period, which was roughly contemporaneous with the Yinxu Ruins.

In Dobrovat, a village in northeastern Romania, a Chinese team explored the similarities and differences between painted pottery items of the local Cucuteni-Trypillia Culture and the Yangshao Culture of the same era in North China, gaining a better understanding of how agrarian cultures developed across Eurasia.

Following a hiatus caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, these cooperative projects have resumed work this year.

"A deeper understanding of other civilizations can help us better review the characteristics of our own," Wang Wei said.

Art meets sports

Children and their parents make Asian Games-themed paintings and doodles with Song Dynasty (960-1279) cultural elements at the newly restored Song Dynasty Deshou Palace in Hangzhou, Zhejiang province, on Sunday. LIN YUNLONG / FOR CHINA DAILY

Writings: English version of book by Xi launched at fair

From page 1

In another development, the launch ceremony for the English edition of *Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era: Questions and Answers* was held in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, on Saturday, at the 40th Kuala Lumpur International Book Fair event, with China as the guest of honor.

The book presents the fundamental spirit, content and requirement of the Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era in a comprehensive and accessible manner through a question and answer format. It features rich content, innovative presentation, clear illustrations and easy to understand language.

The English-language edition was published through collaboration between People's Publishing House and Xuexi Press of China and India's GBD Books, targeting English-speaking countries worldwide. It helps the international community comprehensively understand the main ideas of Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era, and deepen the understanding on the wisdom and responsibility of the CPC, which is committed to promoting the building of a better world.

Officials from the Publicity Department of the CPC Central Committee, figures from Malaysia's political, academic, press and publishing circles, and representatives from think tanks attended the launch ceremony.

XINHUA

Pulling for a good harvest

Farmers compete in a tug of war in Zigui, Hubei province, on Saturday. Fun activities, including tug of war and catching fish with bare hands in a paddy field, were organized to promote farming and folk customs, and to pray for a good harvest. WANG HUIFU / XINHUA

Country to inject vitality into high-quality growth

Tech advances lauded, deeper global cooperation urged to drive innovation

By MA SI and CHENG YU

China will make a greater contribution to addressing global challenges and buoying the world's economic recovery, as the country injects new vitality into pursuing high-quality development and deeper opening-up, international organizations, company executives and scientists said.

Highlighting that decoupling would be a "big mistake", they praised China's technological advances and called for deeper international cooperation in driving innovation and dealing with uncertainties such as supply chain disruptions, at the ongoing 2023 Zhongguancun Forum.

"Decoupling is a wrongheaded idea and a big mistake. The United States would be foolish to try to delink from China," said Denis Simon, president of the Alliance of Global Talent Organizations, in an interview with China Daily on the sidelines of the forum.

Such attempts will make the US unable to benefit from China's achievement in solving problems, which are also of concern to US people and to people around the world, Simon said.

Global challenges such as climate change, food security and potential future pandemics "require us to work together if we want to come up with any meaningful solution", he said.

In a video speech to the forum in Beijing, which runs through Tuesday, Microsoft co-founder Bill Gates said China has an incredible mix of expertise and experience, as well as long-standing investment in scientific and technological innovation.

China will be able to make unique contributions by sharing its technologies and its experience, Gates said.

Nick Fowler, chief academic officer at Elsevier, a Netherlands-based academic publishing company that owns prestigious medical journals such as *The Lancet* and *Cell*, said cooperation is vital to achieving scientific breakthroughs.

There is enduring strength in the China-US research relationship, despite noises about the two countries decoupling, according to a report by Elsevier and the Association of Pacific Rim Universities, a network of leading universities in the Americas, Asia and Australasia.

The Field Weighted Citation Impact — a proxy measure of research quality — of China-US co-authored publications reached almost two, which is twice the world average, and higher than the performance of either China or the US alone, the report said. "This shows that much could be achieved by acting together for the common good through research collaboration," Fowler said.

The comments came after China made steady progress in technological innovation. China climbed to 11th in the 2022 Global Innovation Index, up from 34th in 2012, and was the only middle-income economy in the top 30, according to the World Intellectual Property Organization, which compiles the index.

China's innovation prowess, for instance, is prominent in the photovoltaics industry, which secures it a pivotal position in global supply chains.

Martin Green, a professor of photovoltaics at Australia's University of New South Wales, told China Daily that "the world is going to be dependent on China for the next five years, at least, to supply the panels that the world needs".

"The Chinese industry is quite adventurous and willing to adopt new technology, (and) the pace of photovoltaics has never been quicker than it is at the moment," said Green, who is also widely known as the "godfather of photovoltaics".

China's commitment to a higher-level of opening-up is also injecting more confidence into multinational companies.

Ola Kaellenius, chairman of the board of management of Mercedes-Benz Group, said in a video message played at the forum that he is confident that Beijing, with its clear commitment to continuing with reform and opening-up policy and constantly improving business environment, will remain an attractive choice for foreign investors.

"Our joint venture in Beijing has become the largest production site of Mercedes-Benz in the world, and our investment over the years has not only covered the expansion of production but also enhancement in local research and development along the whole automotive value chain," he added.

Contact the writers at masi@chinadaily.com.cn

Call for policy support to spur demand

By OUYANG SHIJIA
ouyangshijia@chinadaily.com.cn

China's economy is on the road to steady recovery amid pressures from a complicated and grim external environment and insufficient demand, highlighting the need for more policy support to stabilize expectations and spur market confidence, according to analysts.

They said the economy has shown an uneven recovery with the endogenous driving force still weak and demand lackluster, and the focus should be placed on boosting domestic demand as well as supporting the development of the private sector.

The comments came as China's major industrial enterprises saw their profits fall at a slower pace in April amid the continued recovery of industrial production and rapid growth in revenues.

Data from the National Bureau of Statistics showed on Saturday that industrial enterprises with annual revenue of at least 20 million yuan ($2.83 million) saw their total profits drop by 18.2 percent year-on-year in April after a 19.2 percent decline in March.

For the January to April period, profits of industrial enterprises fell 20.6 percent year-on-year, compared with the 21.4 percent drop recorded in the first quarter, the bureau said.

Sun Xiao, a statistician at the NBS, said that industrial enterprises are facing difficulties amid a grim international environment and more efforts should be made to expand demand, shore up confidence and spur market vitality.

Zhou Maohua, an analyst at China Everbright Bank, said the structure of corporate profitability has improved due to the steady recovery of domestic demand, falling prices of commodities, solid policy support that help reduce production costs and a relatively low comparison base in the previous year.

Difficulties and pressures notwithstanding, a steady improvement in industrial profits in the coming months is expected with stronger policy support, Zhou said.

Louise Loo, lead economist at British think tank Oxford Economics, said that fiscal support will be targeted at industries in the form of tax incentives or subsidies, while the monetary policy will be focused on liquidity support instead of interest rate cuts.

Wang Jianjun, vice-chairman of the China Securities Regulatory Commission, said the economy has maintained the recovery trend this year with optimized COVID-19 response measures and strong policy support.

China has the most complete industrial system in the world and an ultra-large domestic market, and the basic trend of steady long-term growth for its economy remains unchanged, which will lay the foundation for high-quality development of listed companies, Wang told the Annual Congress of China Association for Public Companies and 2023 Chinese Listed Companies Summit on Saturday.

Liu Qingfeng, chairman of Chinese artificial intelligence pioneer iFlytek Co, said the nation is on the right track to joining the top ranks in the world in terms of technological innovation.

Emerging technologies such as AI will empower companies and help build China's strength in the industry, he added.

Accurate, timely news release work wins praise

By LI LEI
lilei@chinadaily.com.cn

A panel of government officials and scholars lauded on Saturday the role played by China's news spokesperson system and its news release work in building social consensus, managing public emergencies and burnishing the country's global image since 2012.

Over the years, the Chinese government's news release events have been held at multiple levels and at high frequency, and served the country's development well, said Sun Yeli, director of the State Council Information Office, while addressing the Third China Spokesperson Forum.

More than 100 representatives from central and local government departments, universities and media outlets participated in the discussions in Beijing.

Information that is of "people's utmost concern", including those relating to employment, healthcare and housing, has been disseminated through such events, which helped both central and local governments win the recognition, understanding and support of the public, Sun said.

During the pandemic, the timely and accurate explanation of COVID-19 control policies and disease prevention expertise helped boost people's confidence and assuage panic, Sun told the forum hosted by the State Council Information Office and Tsinghua University.

As part of its news release work, the Chinese government also invited reporters working for foreign media outlets to attend official news conferences, and offered them the convenience of conducting interviews at the grassroots level, Sun said.

"News conferences have become an important platform to present to the world China's wisdom, proposals and solutions," he added.

Tsinghua University is among the first higher-learning institutions that participated in nurturing the news spokesperson system about four decades ago.

Peng Gang, a vice-president of the university, told the forum that the cause of news release work has made "significant progress" after the country adopted market-oriented reforms in the late 1970s and as it continues to strive to achieve socialist modernization.

"Since the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China in 2012, the progress has accelerated, and played a crucial role in modernizing social governance, telling China's development stories to the world and presenting its image to the global audience," he said.

Zhao Chenxin, deputy director of and spokesman for the National Development and Reform Commission, the nation's top economic planner, said that news release work involves constantly innovating the discourse system. Spokespersons must speak in lucid, comprehensible language that common people can understand, he said.

Official news releases need to focus on public concerns, and share the details about difficulties involved and efforts made by authorities to solve them, so as to "gain understanding and support of the masses to the greatest extent possible", Zhao said.

Forum participants also agreed that more training programs are needed for spokespersons at various levels, because they are the bedrock for ensuring the "high-quality development" of the news release work.

The State Council Information Office held The First China Spokesperson Forum in 2016 in Shanghai and the second in 2018 in Beijing.

The forums were part of broader efforts by central authorities to increase the voice of China and other developing countries on the global stage, where the field of public opinion has long been dominated by Western countries.

"China is moving closer to the center of the world stage, and the news release work will play a part that matches China's overall national strength and international status," Sun said.

CHINA

Sci-tech helps explain Chinese modernization

By YANG ZEKUN
yangzekun@chinadaily.com.cn

China has improved international communication through the practice and application of modern science and technology, which has also helped disseminate and promote the Chinese concept of modernization globally, experts said on Saturday.

They made the remarks at Talks of Sci-tech Communication, a series of events held by the Research Institute of International Sci-tech Communication, which was established by the China Association for Science and Technology and China Daily in January of last year, that brings domestic and international communications experts together.

Guo Huadong, chairman of the Chinese Committee of the International Science Council and an academician at the Chinese Academy of Sciences, said the world is vigorously promoting open science and sci-tech communication is becoming increasingly important, and therefore every sci-tech practitioner should also be a sci-tech communicator.

Learning to use the power of big data to achieve sustainable development goals is an important issue for the regions involved in the Belt and Road Initiative, as well as the world, he said. China places great importance on scientific and technological innovation, and in 2021, it set up the International Research Center of Big Data for Sustainable Development Goals, to leverage sci-tech power in achieving these goals.

The center sent seven sets of data on SDGs to the United Nations in March, and its data analysis reports are accessible to countries all around the world.

"I think data is the common language of humanity, and it is also a form of knowledge dissemination. At the same time, we need to let data generate productivity and turn it into information and knowledge," he said.

Liu Shouxun, vice-president of the Communication University of China, said that the first thing that needs to be done to promote Chinese modernization through international communication is to tell China's stories well.

"There are different versions of China's stories. The strength of developed Western nations means their perspective of China has long dominated the international stage, arrogating the right to define the Chinese story in terms of international public opinion," Liu said. "The competition between this version and China's version of its story is the first problem that needs to be resolved through the development of international communications. We need more concepts similar to Chinese modernization, which will not only spread, but also be understood by the world."

Liu said China's international communications should not be limited to the first-level discipline of news communications, but should draw upon philosophy, sociology, politics, literature and many other disciplines.

Strong knowledge production capacity will enable Chinese communicators to generalize and clearly explain concepts related to China, such as Chinese modernization and its connotations, and then reappropriate the right to speak about and define China's image in international communications, he said.

Hu Zhengrong, director of the Institute of Journalism and Communication at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, said that the sci-tech story is a part of China's story and is significant in showing the world a reliable, admirable and respectable image of the country.

Sci-tech and communication are mutually empowered, Hu said, adding that science and technology have empowered communication in fields such as production, circulation and consumption, while communication improves the ability and level of sci-tech exchange.

Behind the story of science and technology are the common pursuit and values of humankind. The values behind China's sci-tech stories are universal and appeal to international readers, he said.

Guests of honor launch the Talks on Sci-tech Communication series on Saturday in Beijing.
FENG YONGBIN / CHINA DAILY

What they say

The future of AI is not just about China, or the United States, or any single nation. It is about all of us, collectively, working toward a future where AI is used to solve our most pressing challenges, to enhance our understanding of the world, and to improve the quality of life for all.

Andy Mok, *senior research fellow at the Center for China and Globalization*

Helping the public to understand science is the responsibility of scientists, and only when science is widely understood by the public, can it develop. The popularization of science should spread awareness of scientific knowledge and its resulting social impact, and in China, key groups should include teenagers, young adults as well as the elderly, as society is rapidly aging.

Fang Xin, *academician at the World Academy of Sciences for the advancement of science in developing countries and former deputy Party secretary of the Chinese Academy of Sciences*

Over the past two years, domestic scientists have worked hard to achieve sustainable development goals through the power of science and technology. They have shared data with the world and promoted sustainable development through the power of data, which is the common language of human beings, and I think is also a form of knowledge transmission.

Guo Huadong, *chairman of the Chinese Committee of the International Science Council and academician at the Chinese Academy of Sciences*

In the construction of our country's current international communication system, we must create a strategic communication system with distinctive Chinese characteristics, and boost the influence of international communication, the attraction of Chinese culture, affinity toward China, the persuasiveness of Chinese discourse, and the ability to shape international public opinion.

Liu Shouxun, *vice-president of the Communication University of China*

China has a unique skill set in terms of disseminating healthcare and technological advances, and of being able to disseminate the knowledge to people within China and other countries, which is important to scientists or doctors or even laymen. We can see how healthcare, public health and science news are becoming more accessible to people.

Evelyne Bischof, *professor at the Renji Hospital of Shanghai Jiao Tong University School of Medicine*

While telling the stories of China's science and technology, we should not only share the facts of science and technology development, but also speak of the human element in science and technology.

Hu Zhengrong, *director of the Institute of Journalism and Communication at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences*

YANG ZEKUN AND WANG XIAOYU

Better telling of science stories encouraged

Skillful individuals key to introducing national achievements to world

By WANG XIAOYU
wangxiaoyu@chinadaily.com.cn

Chinese science communicators are being encouraged to overcome the challenges of the complicated international environment and enhance their storytelling skills to popularize science, experts said at an event in Beijing on Saturday.

Wang Jinzhan, a member of the leading Party members group of the China Association for Science and Technology, said that information technology, artificial intelligence and other tools of innovation have facilitated the spread of China's science stories.

Meanwhile, fiercer global competition in science, and changing dynamics among countries have posed challenges for science communicators devoted to international communication.

"There remains a long road ahead to reach the goal of enabling international audiences to access, understand and recognize science stories from China," he said.

Wang was speaking during Talks on Sci-tech Communication, a series of events that gather domestic and international experts in communication, science and technology to discuss ways to share stories about Chinese scientists, and promote nongovernmental exchange in the fields of science and the humanities.

They are organized by the Research Institute of International Sci-tech Communication, which was established by the China Association for Science and Technology and China Daily in January last year.

Wang called for exploring more creative ways tailored to different audiences and platforms to popularize science, as well as integrating hard science stories with traditional Chinese values.

He said topics like how China tackles climate change, controls epidemics, explores space, as well as its progress in fundamental and frontier research and major projects should be further popularized.

"It is also important to train talented individuals with knowledge of both science and communication, who are fluent in Chinese and foreign languages and understand both domestic and foreign environments," he said. "We should create better working environments and development paths for them."

Wang Hao, deputy editor-in-chief of China Daily, said science and technology have huge potential for generating stories that can showcase a true, multidimensional and panoramic view of China.

Amid changes to the international order and reforms taking place in the communications sector, he called for better concerted efforts to tell stories of Chinese scientists to the rest of the world.

Fang Xin, an academician at the World Academy of Sciences for the advancement of science in developing countries, and former deputy Party secretary of the Chinese Academy of Sciences, said that international communication on science and technology can help promote communication and cooperation among world scientists, and advance exchange between regions.

"Building an efficient network for sci-tech communication is not only indispensable to the development of science, the economy and society, but is also significant in raising the overall literacy of the public," she said.

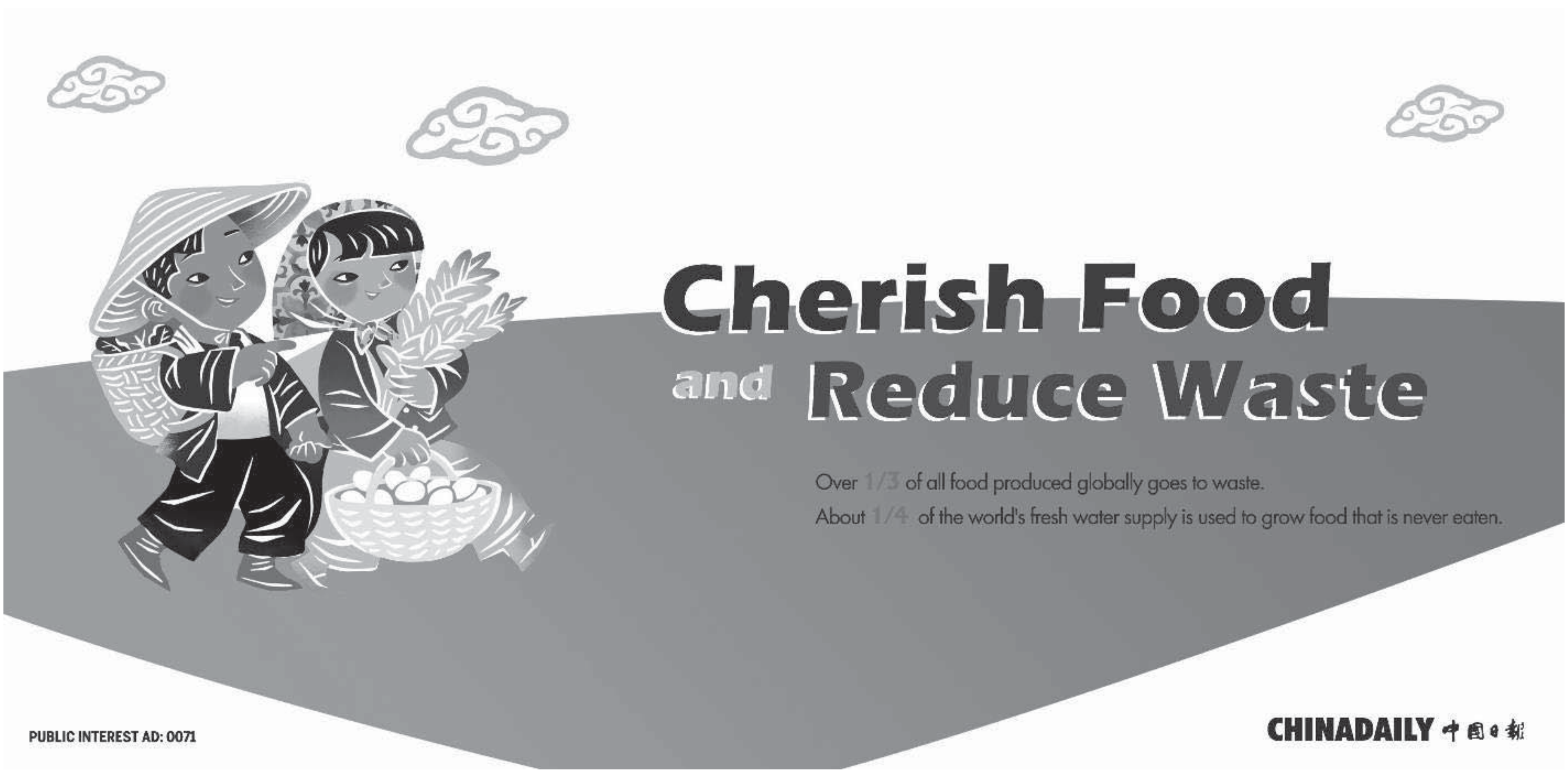
Fang said multiple and easy-to-understand channels should be deployed to popularize science. "Regarding hotly discussed topics, such as genetically modified technology and waste disposal approaches, we should step up communication and dialogue with the public to gain a consensus," she said.

Andy Mok, a senior research fellow at the Center for China and Globalization, shared his thoughts on artificial intelligence and the potential role of China in the rapidly evolving field during the event.

He said China has unique strengths in developing AI, such as its vast and diverse data resources, comprehensive government support, strong technical talent pool and a strategic focus on intelligent content curation and human feedback, which "suggest that the country is well-positioned to lead in the next generation of AI advancements".

Mok stressed China's potential ascendancy in AI, or any other country's progress in AI, can complement each other and contribute to the collective progress of humanity.

"As we venture into this new era of AI, let us do so in the spirit of shared endeavor and with a vision of a better world," he said.



CHINA

Smart cities share stories of digital governance

By **CHEN MEILING**
and **YANG JUN** in Guiyang

Digital governance is a trend, not a choice, in solving common problems of urban development such as aging populations, and of improving efficiency to benefit people in these changing times, experts said at a recent forum.

Many countries have introduced digital tools like big data and artificial intelligence in the creation of smart cities, and significant achievements have been made in fields such as agriculture, education and industry.

At a smart farm in Palmerston North, New Zealand, AI is used to monitor cows and enables them to roam freely with little human interference.

"There will also be an area with digital monitoring to allow the cow to get its back scratched when it needs, and the milking process has been automated so that cows can be milked when they feel the need to be milked. Minimum human labor is needed," Gabrielle Loga, international relations manager for Palmerston North, told China Daily at the Smart City Forum for International Friendship Cities in Guiyang, Guizhou province, on Friday.

"The application of AI is not only great for production itself but also has boosted tourism, and is particularly popular with children for educational purposes," she said, adding that the city will hopefully collaborate with Guiyang on smart farming soon.

Palmerston North consults residents on public issues, which Loga says generates "thick documents or submissions with lots of words" that traditionally are quite labor-intensive and time-consuming to read through.

"However, since we have been experimenting with large language models, AI has been able to help us go through submissions much faster, so we will be able to encourage more submissions in the future and better understand what our residents want," she said.

The city council has also adopted intelligent environmental monitoring and intelligent monitoring for endangered species, and places importance on green buildings and sustainable construction. As a sister city of Guiyang for the last 31 years, Palmerston North hopes to continue cooperation on agricultural technology, smart learning and digitalization, but is also looking to expand cooperation in other areas such as commerce and ecotourism, according to Loga.

Busan in South Korea, the first smart city approved by the country in 2018, has introduced innovative services like real-time water quality management, smart parking, intelligent medicine and carbon-free applications in its 28,000-square-kilometer Eco City area.

In January last year, 65 families moved into the Eco City to test out the services, and local authorities are smoothing out the problems before the system is expanded to other areas, according to Kim Myogeum, chief representative of the Shanghai office of Busan.

"Busan became a super-aging society in 2022, and there are many old residents who live by themselves. We observe their behavior and condition so help and care can be offered in time," she said, adding that technology is being used to create a healthier and cleaner environment so that residents can live better lives.

Busan ranks first in terms of smart city construction in South Korea, according to Kim.

In Tripoli, Greece, devices have been installed in all public areas to monitor the use of energy.

Through intelligent calculation, resources needed to grow a crop can be determined precisely to avoid excessive use, and with flooding a frequent hazard, the city has developed an alert system to warn inhabitants of danger, Konstantinos Tzoumis, mayor of Tripoli, told the forum at the China International Big Data Industry Expo 2023, which concluded on Sunday.

This year is the first time the expo has resumed in-person events since COVID-19. It's also the first time a special booth has been set up to showcase the achievements of 13 cities in eight countries — Greece, Italy, South Korea, New Zealand, Spain, Thailand, the United Kingdom and the United States.

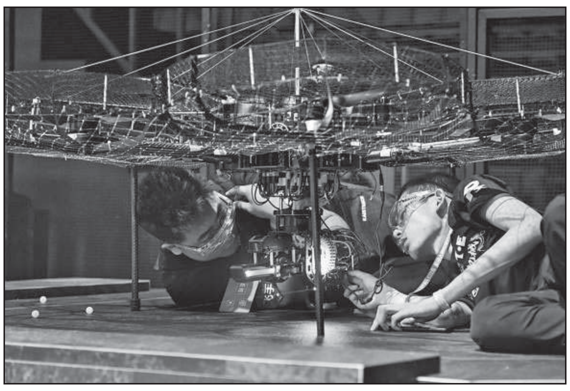
Bernadia Irawati Tjandradewi, secretary-general of United Cities and Local Governments Asia-Pacific Section, said that sharing the experiences of digital governance is important because cities and local governments have a wealth of information on improving productivity and helping people live more comfortably.

"From this forum, we'll learn how cities have been using smart city technology in fields like agriculture, health and education. This inspires other local governments to do better as well," she said.

The organization, which connects 140,000 cities in 140 countries and regions, plans to create a committee for digital governance to help more governments and cities embrace digitalization and sustainable development, she added.

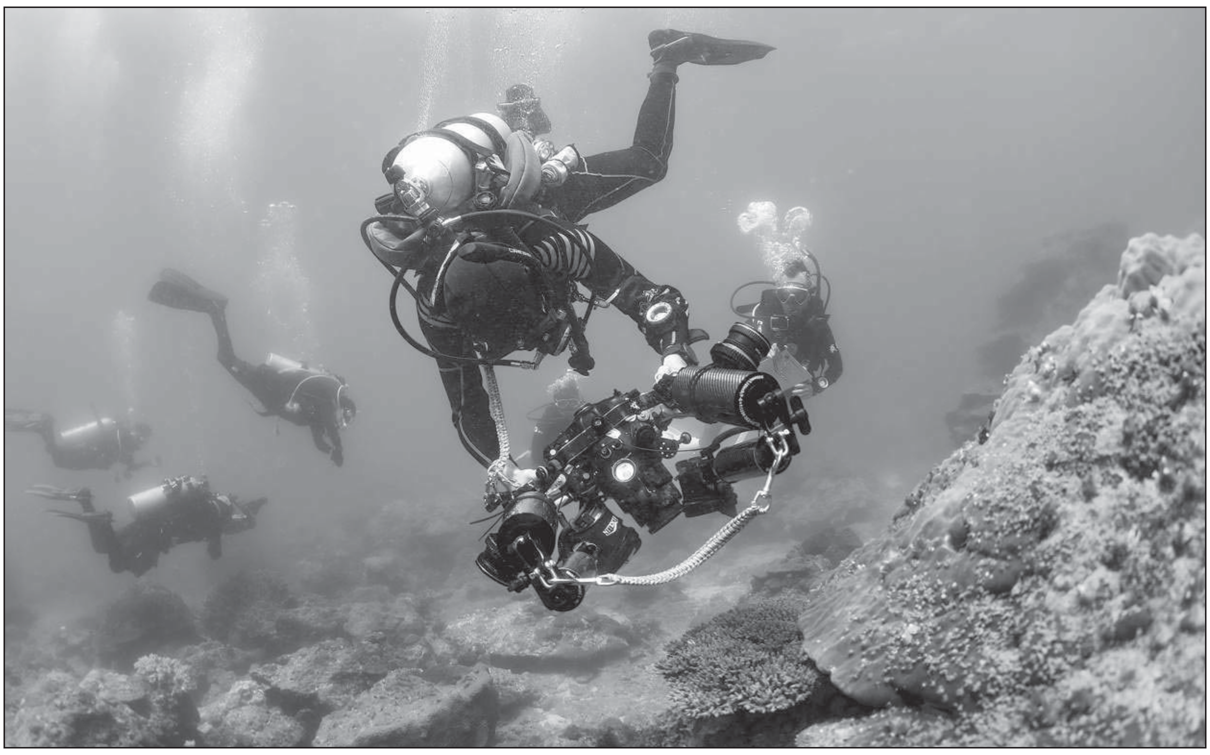
Contact the writers at chenmeiling@chinadaily.com.cn

Robot rumble



Young engineers tinker with a flying robot during a break in the RoboMaster University Championship regional competition in Changsha, Hunan province, on Sunday. During the intense live-fire robotics competition, contestants unleashed a varied fleet of robots to fight in team battles. CHEN ZHENHAI / XINHUA

Scuba shoot



A photographer takes a picture on the seabed off Wuzhizhou Island in Sanya, Hainan province, on Sunday during China's first national-level underwater photography competition. Some 40 shutterbugs took part in the event. XINHUA

Cyberspace cleanup targets rumormongering accounts

Some 66,600 closed as authorities take strict stance against fake professionals

By **CUI JIA**
cuijia@chinadaily.com.cn

China has permanently closed 66,600 individual media accounts on social media and online in the past two months as part of a special campaign to crack down on rumormongering, imposture and illegal for-profit activities, the Cyberspace Administration of China said on Saturday.

In the latest move to create a healthier internet ecosystem in China, cyberspace administrative agencies have been carrying out a special campaign targeting individual media since March 10.

By May 22, more than 1.4 million items of illegal content on popular social media platforms like Sina Weibo, WeChat and Douyin had been removed, and over 927,600 accounts had been dealt with, the CAC said in a statement.

During the campaign, some individual media account operators were found to have made up rumors about trending topics to attract views. A total of 7,541 accounts have been permanently closed for rumormongering or for spreading rumors, according to the statement.

A total of 279,600 accounts have been penalized for deliberately using the faked identities of government organs, military organizations and news agencies. Authorities have also targeted accounts with terms such as "teacher", "lawyer" or "doctor" in their name, when account operators aren't certified professionals.

Some accounts have been found taking advantage of vulnerable groups, including the elderly, people with disabilities and minors, in the pursuit of financial gain.

Some of the violations detected have been transferred to the police for further investigation.

The statement said authorities will take a strict approach in punishing both violators and platform operators who have failed to perform due supervision.

The latest campaign is part of "Operation Qinglang" ("clear and bright" in Chinese), which was launched by the CAC in 2021. Its aim is to create a better internet ecosystem.

A series of special campaigns to clean up cyberspace will continue into 2023 to rectify nine issues that have harmed the online experience of Chinese netizens, including the disorder in individual media, information manipulation by paid internet trolls and undue attacks against private companies, the CAC said at a news conference in March.

The authority requires internet and social media platforms to devise stricter and more detailed regulations governing the registration, operation and closure of individual media accounts, especially those posting about medicine, law and education.

Albino panda caught on camera in Sichuan reserve

CHENGDU — Infrared cameras have captured footage of the world's only all-white panda approaching a mother panda and her cub in the Wolong National Nature Reserve in Sichuan province, reserve management authorities said on Saturday.

In the footage recorded at the end of February, the all-white panda walked toward the mother panda and the cub resting in a tree hollow and signaled its desire to interact. The mother panda remained calm and didn't move.

When the mother and her cub eventually left, the all-white panda returned and smelled the spot where they had been.

"The cub in the footage is about one to two years old, and the all-white panda is nearly the size of an adult. By the end of February, adult wild pandas in Wolong are in the estrus (mating) season, during which female pandas with cubs can be very aggressive when an adult panda approaches or invades," said Wei Rongping, a senior engineer at the China Conservation and Research Center for Giant Pandas.

> "This female panda was extremely calm and did not behave as expected. One possibility is that she is the mother of the all-white panda."
>
> **Wei Rongping,** senior engineer at the China Conservation and Research Center for Giant Pandas

"This female panda was extremely calm and did not behave as expected. One possibility is that she is the mother of the all-white panda," Wei added.

There are a further 15 video recordings of the overlapping trajectories of the three pandas over a short period, according to the reserve's management.

The distinctive panda was first spotted on infrared cameras at an altitude of about 2,000 meters in the Wolong National Nature Reserve in April 2019.

With no spots and red eyes, it was determined that the wild giant panda was an albino, and is thought to be the only one of its kind.

XINHUA

The all-white panda is caught on camera in the Wolong National Nature Reserve in Sichuan province in February. XINHUA

Zhongguancun Trade Fair to become international platform

By **ZHANG ZHIHAO**
zhangzhihao@chinadaily.com.cn

The Zhongguancun International Technology Trade Fair is to become a global platform to showcase the latest scientific and technological achievements, connecting customers to innovation and contributing to the sustainable development of the global economy, according to prominent event attendees.

The 2023 iteration of the fair kicked off in Beijing on Saturday. Since its launch in 2020, it has become a key component of the Zhongguancun Forum by allowing innovators from around the globe to present their products to potential buyers.

During the opening ceremony, Wu Zhaohui, vice-minister of the Ministry of Science and Technology, said that China will expand its international presence in technology transfer and commercialization, create a global network for technological innovation and enhance the overall efficiency of its system of innovation.

According to the ministry, the number of technology contracts signed in China rose from 412,000 in 2018 to 773,000 last year, with contract value increasing from 1.77 trillion yuan ($250.7 billion) to 4.78 trillion yuan in the same period. Tech companies are the centerpiece of the commercialization of scientific and technological achievements, accounting for 93.7 percent of China's technological exports and 82.8 percent of its technological imports.

Zhang Tao, vice-president of the Chinese Academy of Sciences, said that he hopes parties will take advantage of the trade fair as a platform to connect and promote global transactions of technological innovations, and strengthen international exchange and cooperation in science and technology.

Zhang Guihua, executive secretary of the Secretariat of the China Association for Science and Technology, said that China is willing to cooperate with foreign partners to make global trade in technology more convenient, digitalized and intelligent.

This will allow for more products to reach the market and benefit society, and create more favorable conditions for foreign professionals to work in China, he said.

Yu Yingjie, a vice-mayor of Beijing, said the fair will help people find technology and meet demands, help professionals and capital facilitate the commercialization of scientific and technological output, and support quality socioeconomic progress.

Siddharth Chatterjee, resident coordinator of the United Nations in China, said technology is providing humanity with enormous opportunities, but that technological progress should be for the common good, and not result in the creation of new barriers.

The international community should ensure coordination and cooperation in the development and use of technology, he said, adding that the communities most affected by new technologies should have a greater voice in how they are used.

SND embraces role as beacon of innovation

Conference highlights the importance of Suzhou as leading photon hub

A night view of Suzhou New District, Jiangsu province. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

The Taihu photonics sci-tech park. SND is helping enterprises to enhance their core strengths in production capacity, cost and yield.

By YUAN SHENGGAO

The 2023 China (Suzhou) World Photonics Development Conference takes place in the Suzhou New District, Jiangsu province, from Monday to Wednesday.

"We will gather global academicians, experts, scholars and industry elites to build a diverse, open and innovative global sharing platform," said an official from the SND.

Photonics is a strategic high-tech industry with extensive applications. In August 2022, Suzhou made a proposal to develop the Taihu Lake Photon Center into a world-class photonics innovation center. Since then, a series of practical actions have been taken to boost the photonics industrial cluster in the SND.

Leading companies are taking the initiative to bring together innovation resources such as upstream and downstream enterprises in the industrial chain, universities and research institutes to meet the needs of industrial development.

A project on the commercialization of nitrogen-coated laser chips is currently underway in the SND. It has been launched by Suzhou Everbright Photonics, a high-tech enterprise specializing in high-power diode laser chips, optoelectronic devices and application systems, and the Suzhou Institute of Nano-Tech and Nano-Bionics at the Chinese Academy of Sciences, which has a large number of cutting-edge scientific research achievements.

Another key project is the high-power semiconductor laser innovation consortium led by Suzhou Everbright Photonics in July 2022, which was selected as one of the first batch of Suzhou's innovation consortiums.

Suzhou Everbright Photonics is a key enterprise in SND.

Since its launch, Suzhou Everbright Photonics has cooperated with 12 joint venture members including Gusu Lab, Southeast University, Industrial Technology Research Institute, Zhejiang University and Suzhou Institute of Biomedical Engineering and Technology at the Chinese Academy of Sciences to collaboratively innovate and tackle multiple technological bottlenecks.

The consortium sent a 35W high-power semiconductor laser chip to the production line for mass production and shipment. Now, Suzhou Everbright Photonics is working closely with the Suzhou Institute of Nano-Tech and Nano-Bionics under the Chinese Academy of Sciences to establish a joint laboratory for gallium nitride lasers and accelerate the industrialization of scientific research achievements.

On May 12, the Suzhou Photonics Industry Federation was established in the SND, unveiling a new chapter for the integrated development of the city's photonic sector. Led by leading enterprises and institutes such as Hengtong Group, InnoLight Technology (Suzhou), Visionox, and Suzhou Everbright Photonics, the federation aims to form an industrial alliance with enterprises, universities, research institutes and innovative entities to boost industrial technological innovation, industry-academic research cooperation and enterprise incubation.

TZTEK, a leading photonic manufacturing enterprise in the SND, has always had an understanding of the sector. "The photonics industry is a technology-intensive industry, and we must constantly iterate and upgrade technology according to the demands of the times and customers to stand above the competition," said Cao Kuikang, the company's chief technology officer. "We have always maintained a high level of research and development, with R&D investment accounting for more than 15 percent of our income. Thanks to the innovation iteration of technology, the development of the company is fast."

Cao said that a shortage of high-end innovative talents is a challenge that enterprises face in the process of technological innovation. For small and medium-sized enterprises, such a challenge becomes more prominent.

The Suzhou optoelectronics technology research institute has witnessed the rapid growth of SMEs in the photonics industry.

Li Xia, executive director of the institute, said: "We now have 11 enterprises with hardcore technologies, all of which are incubated by the institute itself, and each enterprise has solved a bottleneck problem in the photonics industry."

As a research body introduced by the SND, the institute focuses on the photonics industry and has formed the entire chain of photonics emission, manipulation, optical reception and industrial development. It is committed to launching scientific and technological innovation and achievement transformation.

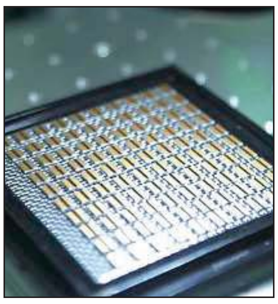
Startup teams can conduct R&D and push scientific research achievements to the market. "Enterprises can receive support from various process nodes, greatly shortening the R&D time," said Li.

Over the years, the SND has advanced innovation through cooperation between the institute and enterprises and gathered more than 100 central institutes and research bodies, such as the Suzhou Institute of Biomedical Engineering and Technology, Suzhou Campus of Nanjing University and Suzhou Industrial Technology Research Institute of Zhejiang University, providing intellectual support for technological innovation in the photonics industry.

Currently, the SND is also accelerating the construction of basic technological platforms such as advanced compound semiconductors, silicon photonics integration and micro-electromechanical systems. By leveraging advantageous resources and providing public services such as chip manufacturing, packaging and testing, the SND is helping enterprises to enhance their core strengths in production capacity, cost and yield, stimulate the rapid growth of startups and provide a source of power for the innovative development of the photonics industry.

Bright prospects for photonics industry

By YUAN SHENGGAO



Photonics equipment.

Suzhou New District, or SND, is home to nearly 250 enterprises in the photonics industry, with an industrial scale exceeding 60 billion yuan ($8.5 billion).

The SND is striving to create a more business-friendly environment for enterprises in the photonics sector with high-quality services and a perfect industry ecosystem.

An optoelectronic industrial park is currently under construction in the Suzhou science and technology town that will bring together government, industry, academia and capital, creating a photon industry cluster worth 100 billion yuan.

Taihu Lake Photon Center, a production and research-oriented park for companies in the photonics industry, is expected to be completed by the end of this year, creating a landmark development carrier with a total construction area of more than 100,000 square meters.

"We have upgraded the Taihu photonics science and technology park, launched the construction of a high-quality talent community in Taihu Science City, and plan a 2-square-kilometer area for photonics innovation," said a local official.

Since August last year, the SND has released a series of favorable policies to speed up the development of the photonics industry.

For example, it launched an investment fund of 10 billion yuan to support innovation in the photonics industry; the district grants up to 200 million yuan in phased assistance for the establishment or restructuring of national key laboratories; it awards up to 50 million yuan and 10 million yuan to support the introduction of leading talents and teams of innovation and entrepreneurship respectively; and the SND also gives one-to-one support to domestic and foreign talents such as Nobel Prize winners, academicians and top science and technology award holders.

The Lion Mountain Quantum Computing and Quantum Detection Frontier Laboratory of Nanjing University and the Advanced Sensing and Imaging Technology Industry Research Institute have also been launched to explore a new path of "independent control and cooperation".

Taihu Lake Photon Center is seen as crucial to the development of the photonics industry in Suzhou.

"We will continue to promote the deep integration of the industrial chain, innovation chain, talent chain and fund chain, and strive to achieve a photonics industry revenue scale of more than 100 billion yuan by 2025," said an official in the district.

Photonics is one of the key industries of the 21st century. Suzhou has a solid foundation for developing the photonics industry, with strong growth momentum and advantages in innovative resources. At present, the scale of the photonics industry in the city has exceeded 360 billion yuan, of which the core segment has achieved an output value of over 60 billion yuan, forming a complete industrial chain from photon generation and transmission to application.

Suzhou has a solid foundation in developing the photonics industry. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

CHINA

Son follows father's selfless footsteps to Africa

Jia Jianhong working with medical aid team in Rwanda, just as dad did decades ago

By **YUAN HUI** in Hohhot and **ZHANG XIAOMIN**

Thirty years ago, 53-year-old Jia Cen was working as a pediatrician in Rwanda as part of a team sent by China on a two-year aid mission. Today, his son Jia Jianhong, 54, is working as a translator for the 23rd Chinese medical team dispatched to the African country.

Both father and son are from the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region People's Hospital.

"My father's experience made me yearn to get involved in foreign aid work," said Jia Jianhong, director of the hospital's international cooperation office, who arrived in Rwanda with 14 others last December on a one-year aid mission.

This year marks the 60th anniversary of the dispatching of Chinese medical teams to foreign countries.

Over the years, Chinese doctors have treated patients, exchanged ideas with local doctors and shared their experience and technology across the vast African continent.

Back in 1991, Jia Cen was the hospital's deputy director of general pediatrics at a time when the autonomous region's health department was preparing to send the 6th national medical team to Rwanda.

"As a Party member, I felt I should respond to the call and help the African people. So I applied to join without hesitation," he recalled.

He arrived in Rwanda in April 1992.

Based in a hospital in Rwanda's Eastern province, which is about 160 kilometers from the capital, Kigali, they were faced with basic working conditions, scarce medical resources and a language barrier.

Although many of the details are now blurred in his memory, Jia Cen still remembers the first sentence he learned in the local language — asking patients if they had a cough.

For him, it is a source of pride to see his son follow in his footsteps and serve as a translator for the medical team, helping patients, local doctors and the medical team members communicate.

Since they arrived in Rwanda, Jia Jianhong and his colleagues have not only carried out routine diagnosis and treatment work, but have also spent time engaging with the people, including during Chinese Anesthesia Week, when they shared ideas and best practices for administering anesthesia and managing pain during surgical procedures with Rwandan doctors, and donated medical supplies.

"Team members paid to help some poor children go to school and bought them books and stationery," he said, adding that Rwanda has undergone remarkable changes since his father worked there.

"Many people can speak a few words of Chinese, and many wear T-shirts with Chinese characters."

From time to time, father and son talk via video call and discuss the changes in Rwanda.

When Jia Cen worked in Rwanda, it would take several months to receive a letter from China because of the lack of transportation and poor communication between local postal workers and the Chinese team members.

He still remembers returning to China through Tanzania in April 1994.

"In one Tanzanian village, people boiled hot water for us with a kerosene stove when they learned that we were a medical team from China," he recalled.

"We deeply felt their friendship. I think it is precisely because of the selfless assistance of our motherland to Africa that we were treated so warmly."

He said he has always told his son to take advantage of his expertise and serve as a bridge of friendship between the Chinese and African peoples.

Contact the writers at yuanhui@chinadaily.com.cn

Jia Jianhong talks to patients in a hospital in Rwanda on May 4. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Lotus has ancient roots in Hebei village

By **ZHANG YU** in Shijiazhuang
zhangyu1@chinadaily.com.cn

Zhang Shengqun has recently finished planting lotus roots across 2 hectares of ponds in Zepan village in Xingtai, Hebei province.

"The beginning of summer is the prime time for planting lotus roots, which are ready to harvest after six or seven months," the 45-year-old said, adding that he expects a yield of 60,000 kilograms in December.

"Over the next few months, we have to take good care of the lotus roots so that they grow well," he said.

There's plenty to be done, including preparing the ponds, planting seedlings, adding fertilizer from time to time, topping up the water levels in the ponds every day and digging up lotus roots once they are ready to harvest.

"It takes patience and skill to dig out a whole root," Zhang said, adding that harvesting the roots is the most challenging part because they might not have grown straight in the soil, and the roots must be harvested whole to sell at a good price.

Lotus roots sell for 20 yuan ($2.80) per kg, while a single root can sell for about 40 to 50 yuan.

"Every year, individual customers and wholesalers line up to buy our lotus roots," Zhang said.

Crisp and of high nutritional value, the lotus roots grown in Zepan earned a national agricultural product of geographical indication in 2012, according to Li Xianguo, a researcher at the county's bureau of agriculture and rural affairs.

Zepan has been growing the roots for 600 years, Li said, adding that during the reign of the Qing Emperor Jiaqing (1796-1820), lotus roots grown in the village were taken as tribute to the imperial palace. Highly prized, the root was then known as the "Zepan Tribute Lotus Root".

According to historical records, the village was given the name Zepan, or "beside the water area", because it was once next to a lake, giving it a natural advantage in growing lotus roots.

The crop was introduced from Shanxi province during the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644), and since then, generations of villagers have made their living from the root.

Over time, the lake receded, but rather than give up, the villagers dug ponds to plant the roots, a practice that continues today.

"The soil here has always been good for growing lotus roots," Zhang said.

Around 1,500 of Zepan's 5,600 residents are engaged in growing or selling lotus roots.

Collectively, the village grows 33 hectares of lotus roots, yielding up to 750,000 kg of the crop per year, according to village Party chief Wang Shifeng.

Wang said the county is planning processing projects for the roots to make use of every part of the plant, from the lotus "whiskers" to its seeds, nuts and flowers.

"This will help broaden channels for increasing village incomes and assist rural vitalization," Wang said.

From left: Farmers plant lotus roots in a pond in Zepan village in Xingtai, Hebei province. Lotus flowers bloom in a pond in Zepan.
PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Pining for China, US professor returns to Taiyuan

TAIYUAN — Having shared for months how he missed Chinese friends and delicacies, David Edgren, better known by the nickname "Grandpa David" on Douyin, the Chinese version of TikTok, finally returned to his second hometown of Taiyuan.

Just six years after China began its reform and opening-up policy in 1978, Edgren came to China from the United States with his family to become an English teacher at Shanxi University in Taiyuan, Shanxi province. "Apart from us, there were only about a dozen Americans in Taiyuan in 1984," said the 80-year-old. "Of all the places we could have lived, Taiyuan impressed us with its hospitality and slow pace of life."

Edgren left China after a year only to find that he had developed a deep affection for the city, so the family returned in 1988 and stayed four more years.

Over the past few decades, Taiyuan has become a second home for them. Edgren flies back and forth giving lectures, and his children have also taught in the city.

"I personally have taught about 350 students here," he said with pride.

But Edgren's story was little-known until his son Andy created a Douyin account to share family stories. Currently, the account has nearly 2 million followers.

Because of the pandemic, the Edgrens were only able to interact with their fans online, and every time they brought up the topic of returning to China, their chatbox would be flooded with blessings and greetings.

"I can't wait to come back. I'm old. I don't know how many chances are left," said Edgren, who came a month earlier than his son, who also has plans in Taiyuan.

Many people have been touched by the American professor's deep attachment to China. At a lecture he delivered at Shanxi University recently, former students from other provinces traveled hundreds of kilometers to greet him.

"I'm humbled, learning that so many people like me and support me," he said.

Edgren was again stunned at the speed with which Taiyuan has been transformed.

"In 1984, we had to take an overnight train from Taiyuan to Beijing, but now it takes less than three hours," he said, adding that he had to travel to Beijing to buy butter, cheese and steak back then, but now, such things can be bought with just the flick of a finger. "Thankfully, I've spent the past few days with friends, or else I would be lost in this familiar but fast-growing city," he said.

The professor said that thanks to reform and opening-up, the country and its people, especially the younger generation, are totally different these days.

"Students have a broader vision and are more confident and expressive today," he said after giving two lectures.

Although nearing his 81st birthday, Edgren still wants to keep coming to China.

"No matter where we come from, humans are fundamentally the same. I hope I can help the people of China and the US understand each other more and deepen their friendship," he said.

XINHUA

Big on bugs, Fujian group sparks public interest

FUZHOU — Cradling a stag beetle specimen in one hand, Liu Pengyu meticulously brushed the dust off it with delicate strokes, fully immersed in the captivating world of insects in his quiet, dimly lit studio.

According to the 43-year-old, the stag beetle, with its sharp, distinctive mandibles, is a symbol of wilderness, vigor and indomitable spirit and was precisely why he chose the insect as the logo for his studio, which houses thousands of well-preserved specimens.

Liu was born and raised in Fujian province, which has the most extensive forest coverage in China and is a treasure trove of biodiversity. As an only child, he often explored the forest near his home and developed a fascination for the small creatures that lived there, treating them as his companions. His interest in these tiny inhabitants continued to grow over time. "Fujian is sometimes referred to as 'Min' for short, and interestingly, the Chinese character for 'Min' includes the symbol for 'bug'," Liu said. "So I believe it's our responsibility to explore the rich trove of insects here and make more people aware of them."

Liu sees understanding as the basis for enhancing awareness of the need to protect insects. "Some look normal but are actually as precious as giant pandas," he said.

Driven by his passion, Liu quit his job in 2017 and rallied a dozen people with similar interests to open a studio in Fuzhou, capital of Fujian. Ever since, they have been venturing into mountains, forests and islands across China in search of insect species they have never seen before. "Some bugs are so rare that you can't even find a picture of them. In those cases, we have to rely entirely on limited descriptions in books," Liu said.

After years of expeditions into the wilderness, the team has become accustomed to encountering poisonous snakes and navigating mudslides. They frequently travel across challenging terrain in pursuit of insects as tiny as 2 millimeters in size, and happily adjust their sleep schedules to align with the nocturnal habits of a particular species.

Despite these obstacles, the team has frequent rewarding moments that keep them going. For instance, team member Guo Liang still vividly recalls his first encounter with a rare golden Kaiser-i-Hind butterfly in pristine forests.

"It fluttered its wings gracefully above us, its distinctive markings glistening in the sunlight," Guo said. "At that moment, we were breathless and in awe."

For a long time, the study and documentation of insect species in China was primarily conducted by foreign entomologists. Today, that trend is reversing as experts like Liu and Guo have insects they discovered that are now named after them. In their spare time, team members give lectures on school campuses to share their knowledge of insects, organize study tours and teach students to make specimens. They have also produced hundreds of videos that are available online, covering a broad range of topics related to insects.

The team's Douyin account has amassed over 130,000 followers and occasionally, unusual questions pop up in the comment section, such as "Do cockroaches bite?".

"This made us realize the significance of educating the public about insects," Liu said. "Regardless of the progress we've made so far, we're still at the beginning of a long journey."

The team's dedication has undoubtedly had an impact as more and more of their social media followers have expressed a keen interest in learning about the legal protection of insects. In recent years, the rise of short-form video platforms has been helpful in introducing nature enthusiasts to the public eye.

According to a report by Douyin, nature and science-related short videos raked in 1.1 billion "likes" on the platform last year, with Generation Z exhibiting a particular interest in this kind of content.

According to Liu, children tend to spend more time on gadgets than on experiencing the outdoors in person, so he wants to enrich their childhoods by inviting them into his world of insects.

Over a century ago, French entomologist Jean-Henri Fabre devoted his life to studying the anatomy and behavior of insects, which he compiled in *Souvenirs Entomologiques*, or *Fabre's Book of Insects*. Fabre is an inspiration for nature enthusiasts like Liu and his teammates, who aspire to leave their own mark in the field. "It's like our slogan says: 'The road ahead is rugged and long. We can only achieve our goals through constant effort,'" Liu said.

XINHUA

COMMENT

Editorials

Washington forced to adjust its strategy as countries reject pushing decoupling

From Washington's perspective, the ideal approach to what it defines as a major-power rivalry with a rising China is formulating a united front composed of as many of its allies and partners as possible. The more it enlists, the greater the chance it will emerge victorious.

But drawing clear geopolitical lines amid today's convoluted international interdependencies, however, won't be as easy as it appears on Washington's drawing board.

French President Emmanuel Macron's recent remarks about European autonomy were a reminder how differently the United States' allies across the Atlantic view Washington's geopolitical priority.

That is why Washington has adopted the term "de-risking", which found its way into the joint communique of the Hiroshima G7 summit, which is used by the US' EU allies as a substitute for "decoupling". Rather than cut off economic and trade ties, they claim that "de-risking" seeks to only reduce "excessive dependencies" in critical supply chains.

Yet, considering what Washington is actually doing, that certainly doesn't suffice to alleviate concerns. Which is why multiple US officials at a webinar last Friday, hosted by the United States Studies Centre at the University of Sydney, did their best to assure their Australian audience that Washington was not presenting an us-or-them choice.

Mira Rapp-Hooper, the National Security Council director for "Indo-Pacific" strategy, admitted allies and partners, within the region and across the world, "don't want to feel like they're being forced to choose between two competing great powers … They don't want to feel like they're being trampled by a headlong clash".

That is exactly what countries, especially those in the Asia-Pacific region, are worrying about.

"It's hard to see how de-risking, at its current ambition and scale, can be strictly confined to just a few strategic areas without affecting broader economic interactions", Singapore Deputy Prime Minister Lawrence Wong told the annual Nikkei forum "Future of Asia" last Thursday in Japan. "If de-risking is taken too far … we will end up with a more fragmented and decoupled global economy."

Warning of a gloomy prospect of every country ending up getting worse off in a world of competing blocs, the Singaporean official also appealed for reviving the World Trade Organization: "Otherwise, if every country takes the view that it will be its own judge of when national security considerations override multilateral rules, then we will end up with a system where might is right and the law of the jungle prevails."

A number of other leading officials from the region aired concerns about escalating China-US rivalry at the event, indicating a prevailing reluctance to take sides between the world's two largest economies.

"We're confident in our own views, non-alignment 2.0, and we want to create our own space and try to go out and get along with everyone," said Dino Patti Djalal, former Indonesian ambassador to the US.

Since major-country rivalry poses an outstanding threat to broad-based growth, it is impossible for Washington to isolate China as it hopes.

Will Congress show sense on debt ceiling?

An "agreement in principle" to raise the US debt ceiling was reached on Saturday between US President Joe Biden and House of Representatives Speaker Kevin McCarthy.

The compromise deal that will keep spending flat for 2024 and impose limits for 2025 in exchange for raising the debt limit for two years, until after the next election, "is an important step forward" and prevents what would have been a catastrophic default, Biden said in a statement.

But the coming days will be a further test for both Biden and McCarthy, both of whom must rally enough support for the agreement within their respective parties to ensure it passes through the House and Senate when it goes to the vote.

Failure to do so would roil the US economy and threaten the financial security of millions of US citizens. Even if the deal does go through, the US people should now be in no doubt that their politicians are ready to hijack the whole nation for their own partisan interests.

Defaulting on its debt obligations would also be an immense embarrassment for the US. As CNN commented, "It is an extraordinary scenario that the rest of the world is wondering whether the US will pay its debts" and defaulting on its debt obligations "would severely dent Washington's claims to reliable global leadership in the long term".

US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen wrote to Congress on Friday saying that her department would run out of money if Congress does not raise or suspend the debt ceiling by June 5.

Although that extends the deadline from June 1, there is unlikely to be much elasticity left.

Those on Capitol Hill should realize that they do not have the luxury of time to try and score points off the other party if an economic and financial disaster of their own making is to be avoided. The disaster would not only shatter the lives of millions of ordinary Americans and damage the credit rating of the US, but also have an adverse impact on the status of the US dollar as a reserve currency which is a pillar of the US' hegemony that they are so desperate to maintain.

The debt ceiling tussle has become a test of whether there are enough moderates in the two parties to prevent the extremists from causing widespread wrack and ruin.

Chip companies victims of tech hegemony

As of last week, various entities from the members of the de facto chip club Washington is trying to set up to starve the Chinese mainland of advanced chips and the equipment to make them have expressed their unwillingness to limit their production and investment in China. It is only those on the island of Taiwan, under the coercion of the secessionist-minded Tsai Ing-wen authorities, that have not added their voices to the chorus.

The Republic of Korea government has urged the Joe Biden administration to review its "guardrail" rules regarding its chip subsidies, as it doesn't think that the US government providing ROK chip companies, such as Samsung and SK Hynix, with subsidies to encourage them to invest in the United States should affect their decisions to expand production on the Chinese mainland.

And the Dutch government has also stressed the necessity for the Netherlands to take the initiative to continue to engage with such a major economy as China, which it says is a preferred economic and trade partner.

Also, the CEOs of Nvidia and Panasonic, two chip giants from the US and Japan respectively, have, on different occasions, both said that the Chinese mainland market is irreplaceable.

All these highlight the strong resistance to Washington's attempts to re-shape the global industry and supply chains of the chip sector in the US' favor. Although the Biden administration might lure the chip giants to expand production in the US through providing them market-law-distorting subsidies, it cannot offer a substitute to the Chinese mainland's huge chip market if it forces them to withdraw from it as a condition for receiving the subsidies.

The US' decoupling efforts in the chip industry will disturb the stability of related industries worldwide, including automobiles, information and electronics. During that process the companies from the US and its allies will bear the main brunt of Washington's weaponization of technology and trade for its own geopolitical ends as it will push up the prices of relevant end products from the Chinese mainland.

After the Japanese government announced that it will implement China-targeted export control measures on semiconductor manufacturing equipment from July this year last week, the share price of a number of Japanese semiconductor-related companies, including Screen Semiconductor Solutions, Advantest and Disco, fell instantly.

That clearly shows the market's view of the influences of the US' tech offensive. The Chinese mainland accounted for about 30 percent of Japan's chip and related equipment exports last year. It remains to be seen how the Japanese companies will fill the gap now that Tokyo is shutting their doors upon the Chinese mainland at the behest of the US.

And that question applies to all companies the US wants to use as pressure points to hobble China's modernization.

CHINA DAILY WORLDWIDE

Contact us at:

China Daily
15 Huixin Dongjie Chaoyang District,
Beijing 100029
News: +86 (0) 10 6491-8366
editor@chinadaily.com.cn
Advertisement: +86 (0) 10 6491-8631
ads@chinadaily.com.cn
Subscription: +86-400-699-0203
subscription.chinadaily.com.cn
App: www.chinadaily.com.cn/mobile/daily.html

China Daily UK
90 Cannon St, London EC4N 6HA, UK
+44 (0) 207 398 8270
editor@chinadailyuk.com

China Daily Asia Pacific
China Daily Hong Kong
Unit 1818, Hing Wai Centre, 7 Tin Wan Praya Road, Aberdeen, Hong Kong
+852 2518 5111
editor@chinadailyhk.com
editor@chinadailyasia.com

China Daily USA
1500 Broadway, Suite 2800,
New York, NY 10036
+1 212 537 8888
editor@chinadailyusa.com

China Daily Africa
P.O. Box 27281-00100, Nairobi, Kenya
+254(0)20 242 8589 (Nairobi)
editor@chinadailyafrica.com
enquiries@chinadailyafrica.com
subscription@chinadailyafrica.com

Zheng Huawei

Opinion Line

US only has itself to blame for stalled military exchanges

Washington has complained of Beijing's nonchalance with regard to its request for a meeting between Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin and his Chinese counterpart Li Shangfu at the Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore on June 2-4.

The latest push was on Thursday when Ely Ratner, assistant secretary of defense for "Indo-Pacific" security affairs, stressed in Washington that Beijing still hasn't given a formal response to the US request for the meeting.

"Secretary Austin and the Department of Defense initiated a request to meet with General Li, and that request has not been answered one way or another," said Ratner. "The ball is in their court at this point."

In saying that, the US side is intent on blaming Beijing for the current difficulties in promoting military exchanges between the two sides. That is not the case.

To begin with, Li Shangfu, who took the post of China's defense minister in March, has been under the US' sanctions for China's purchase of foreign weapons since 2018 when he headed the Equipment Development Department of the Chinese military.

When asked earlier this month whether Washington is intending to lift the sanctions, which is in essence a long-arm jurisdiction and has no legal basis in international law, the US State Department gave a clear negative reply. It said that the sanctions on Li do not prevent him from conducting official meetings with his American counterparts, nor should sanctions be hurdles for military talks between Washington and Beijing.

The farce is a vivid example showing the hypocrisy of the US' sanctions and its understanding of the basic norms of international relations, such as mutual respect and equality.

Meanwhile, the US side has never ceased trespassing across Beijing's redline on the Taiwan question through various means, showing no concerns to China's core interests and also ruining the atmosphere for the exchanges between the two defense ministers.

True China has also sanctioned some US entities and individuals to counter the US' hegemonic actions. But not only the number is much fewer but also the causes are invariably solidly supported by substantial evidences showing the long-term threats of those under sanctions to China's sovereignty and territorial integrity and core interests. More importantly, the list is made with due prudence to avoid affecting the overall development of Sino-US relations.

If the US side treats its coercion of, bullying of and suppression on China as leverage in any dialogue, its request for dialogue will always be met with a cold shoulder.

— LI YANG, CHINA DAILY

Domestic tech progress bar refreshed again

The first domestically manufactured passenger jet C919, a model similar in size to the Airbus 320 and Boeing 737, was put into commercial operation on Sunday flying between Beijing Capital International Airport and Shanghai Hongqiao International Airport.

That marks a big step forward for China's aviation industry. The further development of domestically produced passenger jets is likely to make the country a major global supplier of civil aircraft and relevant products and services in the lucrative market that is primarily dominated by the United States and Europe.

The C919 has entered commercial service at a time when the US, along with its allies, is seeking to decouple from China in technology, research and high-tech industries. This shows that even facing such a harsh external development conditions the Chinese people can still make breakthroughs in some key technologies.

However, it should still be noted that the design and manufacturing of C919 mainly happened between 2007 and 2017 when the first trial flight of the plane was launched and proved to be a success, before the US tightened up its control on technology and industry exchanges and cooperation.

And it should also be pointed out that there are still gaps in some fields between the C919 and Airbus 320 and Boeing 737, two reliable models that have been widely used around the world for years. There remains a long way to go for China to break the two companies' dominance of the world market.

— THEPAPER.CN

What They Say

China-ASEAN common market would be stabilizer

Editor's Note: *The following are excerpts of a speech given by Zheng Yongnian, a researcher of politics with the Chinese University of Hong Kong (Shenzhen), at the China-ASEAN Economic Relations Seminar held in Guangzhou, Guangdong province, on Saturday:*

The current world order is in a challenging period. Both the international security pattern established since the end of World War II and the world economic order based on the World Trade Organization are facing huge challenges.

Over the past 40 years, the dynamism of development in Asia has been the strongest. Now China has become the second-largest economy in the world, Japan the third-largest, and India and Southeast Asian countries are also developing rapidly. Therefore, the development center of the world economy is in Asia at present.

Over the past decades, the economic relations between China and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations have developed fast, but there is still a need for more economic cooperation and the continuous deepening of bilateral ties.

At present, the negotiations for the 3.0 version of the China-ASEAN Free Trade Area are accelerating. However, this is not enough, so it is suggested that the two sides should work together to form a China-ASEAN common market.

This will not only promote sustainable economic growth in the region, but also bring peace and stability. The construction of a China-ASEAN common market would be beneficial for both parties.

Politically, it creates an opportunity for ASEAN countries not to take sides in the competition between China and the United States. Economically, in the context of international trade frictions and intensifying competition with regard to the global industry and supply chains, it is particularly important to promote China's institutional opening of rules, standards, management and other aspects.

From the perspective of ASEAN, the economic and trade exchanges among ASEAN countries are far smaller than those between them and non-ASEAN countries, so ASEAN itself has the motivation to integrate and build a common market.

At present, there are already a series of mechanisms and arrangements under negotiation in Asia, including the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership, Digital Economy Partnership Agreement, etc. The construction of the China-ASEAN common market could help effectively integrate these fragmented mechanisms and create common regional standards.

Peace and development complement each other. Without peace, development will be hindered; without development, peace will have no way to gain a foothold.

VIEWS

China and the World Roundtable | High Temperatures

Editor's note: *Temperatures have surged to record levels across the world over the past years due to rising greenhouse gas emissions, leading to the warming of oceans, particularly the ocean surface, and melting of glaciers and polar ice sheets. This will have far-reaching consequences on the environment and water availability. Five experts share their views on the issue with China Daily.*

Lin Boqiang

Measures to ensure stable energy supply

Temperatures in most parts of China are expected to be above normal this summer, with some places likely to experience droughts or drought-like conditions, according to the National Climate Center. This means the demand for electricity will be higher, meeting which will be a big challenge for the power generation and supply companies. Also, there is a possibility of water shortage in some areas due to the likely increase in the demand for water.

The China Climate Change Blue Book released by the China Meteorological Administration says the eastern and southern parts of Southwest China are likely to witness a fall in annual precipitation levels. And extreme weather events in provinces such as Sichuan and Yunnan, which rely heavily on hydropower to meet their energy demand, will impact their energy generation to some extent.

Sichuan, for example, experienced extremely high temperatures and low precipitation last summer. As a result, the water levels in major rivers fell drastically, reducing hydropower generation which, in turn, made it difficult for Sichuan to meet the surging demand for electricity and water during the peak summer period. As a result, Sichuan had no surplus electricity to supply to other provinces, something it had been doing for years.

Hence, the authorities need to optimize the country's energy mix to ensure smooth supply of electricity, and strengthen energy security, which is important to sustain China's economic development and modernization drive.

Measures should be taken on both the supply and demand side, while promoting inter-regional and interprovincial cooperation in balancing electricity surplus and shortage. Since extreme weather events are likely to increase, and climate risks pose a big challenge to energy generation, there is a need to expedite the construction of smart grids, interconnect provincial power grids, and diversify the power structure to overcome the problem.

The author is the head of the China Institute for Studies in Energy Policy at Xiamen University.

Given the huge impact of extreme weather events on normal life, steps should be taken to make the new smart grids more "resilient" to disruptions. For instance, digitalization and smart planning can help the new grids overcome problems such as excess load and frequent fluctuations.

Through the integration of digital and intelligent technologies, the operators of the new grids can make rapid and informed decisions during emergencies, and thus ensure stable power supply. And the use of intelligent grid regulation combined with scrupulous electricity consumption can help timely address the problem of sudden rise in power demand due to high temperatures. Promoting scrupulous electricity consumption means taking measures such as peak shaving, load shifting and rotating rest days, in order to prevent unplanned power outages.

Electricity consumption by industries accounts for about 70 percent of the total national electricity consumption. Since the proportion of electricity used by urban and rural residents is relatively small, the government's priority is to meet their electricity needs.

In this regard, scrupulous electricity consumption could alleviate the tensions in power supply during power shortages. Better still, smart grids and intelligent management can adjust the proportion of electricity to be supplied to industries and commercial establishments on the one hand and rural and urban residents on the other.

Besides, it is important to interconnect provincial power grids and facilitate electricity transmission between regions via interconnected regional grids. This will help reduce losses caused by localized power outages or inadequate power supply, which affects production.

Meanwhile, provinces with high hydropower potential have attracted huge investments for the construction of hydropower infrastructure. But extreme weather events, including decrease in rainfall, have been reducing hydropower generation, which hinders construction, and production in other sectors and causes losses. These problems can be overcome, to a large extent, by strengthening grid interconnection among provinces.

Also, cooperation and mutual benefit can prevent redundant investment. And by building an interconnected network for power distribution, the authorities can ensure smooth power supply.

Smart grids can also ensure the supply of not only hydropower, thermal power and nuclear power but also solar and wind power. This will help provinces rich in wind and solar power to generate electricity and connect their distribution networks to the smart grids, thus making energy utilization more efficient.

Diversifying the sources of power is crucial for building a new energy system that is coal-based but can be supplemented by hydropower, nuclear power, and solar and wind power.

More important, to achieve the climate goal of peaking carbon emissions before 2030 and realizing carbon neutrality before 2060, the proportion of wind and solar power in the primary energy structure has to be significantly increased. But to achieve that, and to ensure energy security, the authorities need to stabilize the output of wind and solar power.

Addressing the long-term power supply issues associated with the large-scale integration of wind and solar power into the energy structure requires treating energy transformation as a system-wide engineering project. On the production side, increasing energy storage capacity could help stabilize wind and solar power generation, while better coordination among the various stages of power generation, storage and transmission can facilitate stable power supply.

And on the consumption side, the electricity pricing mechanism needs to be reformed to encourage greater participation of consumers in ensuring stable power supply.

The views don't necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

MA XUEJING / CHINA DAILY

Wei Ke

Extreme heat events have now become the new normal

Since the first day of 2023, extreme heat events have increased the threat to human health and the environment. Europe experienced the warmest New Year in history, with temperatures in some places reaching early summer levels. The highest temperature, of 25.1 Celsius, was recorded in Bilbao, Spain. In Glucholazy, Poland, the temperature at 4 am on Jan 1 was as high as 18.7 C, more than the local average minimum summer temperature. And while at least eight European countries experienced their hottest New Year's Day, more than 100 weather stations in France reported record-breaking temperatures.

Unlike gradual global warming which many people expect, extreme heat events have raised temperatures to historical highs in many places. On Jan 1 this year, temperatures in many places in France, Germany, Denmark and Latvia were exceptionally high. For example, the temperature in Berlin, Germany, was 16 C — normally, it hovers around 0 C during New Year.

According to the State of the Global Climate 2022 of the World Meteorological Organization, which was released on April 21, global temperatures in 2022 were 1.15 C higher compared with the pre-industrial levels from 1850 to 1900. Global warming is not a gradual and uniform process anymore; instead, it manifests through a succession of extreme heat events, continuously breaking high-temperature records worldwide.

The author is an associate researcher at the Institute of Atmospheric Physics, Chinese Academy of Sciences.

There has been a significant increase in both the frequency and intensity of extreme heat events. According to the UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction's report, Human Cost of Disasters 2000-19, there were 432 instances of extreme heat events globally between 2000 and 2019 compared with just 130 instances between 1980 and 1999, an increase of a whopping 232 percent.

As the northern hemisphere enters the summer season, extreme heat events have become the norm, rather than the exception. On April 14, Tak province in northwestern Thailand recorded a scorching 45.4 C, breaking Thailand's highest temperature record of 44.6 C set in Mae Hong Son province in 2016.

Record-breaking heat-waves have swept across Southeast Asia, South Asia and Central Asia, with temperatures crossing 42 C. And severe air pollution has further compounded the situation in many parts of Southeast Asia, and thus increased the risk of respiratory and cardiovascular diseases.

The impacts of high temperatures are far-reaching, not only affecting human life and health but also posing a threat to the environment and ecosystems. In 2020, more than 330 elephants in the southern region of Botswana died of cyanotoxin poisoning, as prolonged heat and drought led to a bloom of cyanobacteria in ponds and other water bodies. These cyanobacteria released a significant amount of cyanotoxins in the water bodies, which resulted in the poisoning and subsequent deaths of the elephants that consumed the toxic water.

Extreme heat and drought also contribute to wildfires. In 2019-20, Australia experienced severe heat waves that contributed to the devastating wildfires which lasted for a staggering nine months. While the wildfires caused an economic loss of about 10.3 billion Australian dollars ($6.73 billion), they also claimed the lives of or displaced nearly 3 billion animals — mammals including marsupials, birds, reptiles and amphibians.

Worse, the wildfires emitted about 715 million tons of carbon dioxide, more than Australia's total annual greenhouse gas emissions from fossil fuel combustion.

One of the worst effects of global warming is the "wet gets wetter, dry gets drier" phenomenon, where humid regions experience increased rainfall and arid regions become drier — with the rainy season marked by more severe flooding and the dry season by intense drought.

According to the Human Cost of Disasters 2000-19 report, over the past 20 years, there has been a 134 percent increase in flood-related disasters, 97 percent increase in storms, 46 percent increase in wildfires, and 29 percent increase in droughts or drought-like conditions.

In addition, as the oceans warm, heat-waves emanating from the oceans and seas have become more common. The increasing warming of the ocean surface inhibits the absorption of oxygen by the water, which exacerbates the problem of oxygen depletion in the marine environment, posing a threat to the survival of marine animals and plants. Warmer ocean temperatures also contribute to the increasing frequency and severity of typhoons and hurricanes. And since such storms have a wider range extending to northern latitudes, regions like northeastern China could experience typhoons in the future.

In summer, extreme heat conditions in the northern hemisphere are becoming the norm, prompting the WMO to urge countries to issue early warnings and take early action. But while it is essential for governments and management agencies at all levels to issue weather alerts and forecasts, they should also pay greater attention to the rights of vulnerable groups, including people who work outdoors during hot weather.

Building public heat shelters to protect people during orange and red heat alerts is essential. Especially, public activity centers, libraries and other government facilities allow outdoor workers to avoid working during the hottest hours of the day. As for people in general, they should closely follow weather forecasts and warnings so they can avoid the risk of heatstroke by not venturing out during extreme heat events.

Yet global temperatures will continue to rise as greenhouse gas emissions are unlikely to reduce drastically in the next 20-30 years. Therefore, economies around the world, especially the major economies, should intensify efforts to reduce emissions. The public, on its part, can contribute to the global efforts to mitigate climate change by adopting simple habits including switching off lights when not in use, recycling products, reducing the use of cars, changing the food habit, and refraining from compulsive shopping. These slight changes in habits can help lower individuals' carbon footprint and thus reduce emissions.

But global cooperation is needed to bolster society's resilience to extreme heat and enhance its capacity to overcome climate challenges.

The views don't necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

Han Rui, Liu Buchun and Mei Xurong

Climate change threatens agricultural output

Since the beginning of this summer, northern China has been experiencing abnormally high temperatures and low precipitation. For instance, in the Huang-Huai region (Northern China Plain) and some other parts of northern China, temperatures were 2-4 degree Celsius above normal while precipitation was more than 80 percent below normal from May 6 to 16.

While daily maximum temperature in most areas was above 32 C, in some areas the temperature was as high as 40 C, indicating the early arrival of hot and scorching weather, though the rainfall on May 17-19 helped lower the temperature to some extent and replenish the soil. However, according to the China Meteorological Administration, high temperatures are expected to continue.

Last year, for instance, the Yangtze River Basin, despite the "triple" La Niña event, experienced the most severe drought since reliable record-keeping began. During the prolonged drought period, China experienced an extremely unusual phenomenon: while the northern region was battered by floods, the southern region was in the grip of drought. The drought persisted throughout the summer, fall and winter, resulting in dried-up reservoirs and lower water level in rivers, which reduced power generation, disrupted water supply and caused severe damage to crops.

According to the forecasts of the World Meteorological Organization and the National Climate Center, the world will move into El Niño in summer, with almost the whole of China, except for the northeastern region, experiencing high or higher than usual temperatures. Also, some places in the middle reaches of the Yangtze River could experience high temperatures and drought or drought-like conditions this summer, though the intensity is likely to be less than last year.

Han Rui is a researcher at the Institute of Environment and Sustainable Development in Agriculture, Chinese Academy of Agricultural Sciences.

Liu Buchun is a researcher at the Institute of Environment and Sustainable Development in Agriculture, Chinese Academy of Agricultural Sciences.

Mei Xurong is a researcher at the Institute of Environment and Sustainable Development in Agriculture, Chinese Academy of Agricultural Sciences.

The water flow rate of a river and a reservoir's storage capacity determine the amount of power that can be generated and the areas that can be irrigated by the water released by the dam, thus directly affecting agricultural production. The Yangtze River Basin has the richest water resources in China and thus the highest hydropower generation capacity. In fact, the region accounts for more than 40 percent of China's total hydropower generation, and supplies surplus power to the eastern coastal region. But the heavy reliance on hydropower makes the region highly susceptible to changing weather and climate conditions.

Taking Sichuan province as an example, in 2021, the province's total power generation was 453 billion kilowatt-hours, with hydropower accounting for 353 billion kilowatt-hours, or 82 percent of the total, which supplied one-third of the hydroelectricity to the eastern coastal region. Being the largest hydropower producing province, Sichuan was spared the nationwide power cuts in 2021. But the decline in rainfall by 30 percent in July and 60 percent in August 2022 severely curtailed its hydropower generation capacity. As such, the electricity-surplus province had to seek electricity from other provinces to meet the local demand.

China's southwest region, too, has been experiencing drought since the beginning of this year, with precipitation being more than 80 percent below normal and rainfall 20-30 below average. This reduced the Yangtze's water flow rate by 20-30 percent from January to April, with some places in the middle reaches of the river witnessing a 30-50 percent decrease in the water flow rate. In fact, since the second half of 2022, several major hydropower producing provinces in southwest China, including Yunnan, are witnessing significantly reduced water flow rates, and reduced reservoir and depleting groundwater levels, which have affected hydropower production.

To overcome the problem, Yunnan has taken multiple measures including restricting the use of electricity.

Frequent heat waves and extremely high temperatures, prolonged droughts and severe floods are causing soil erosion, reducing crop yield and affecting crop quality. Also, due to high temperatures and droughts, crops become less resistant to pests and diseases, further reducing crop yield.

To better protect crops, the authorities should adhere to the principle of "preventing disasters to increase production, minimizing losses to increase food supply". They should also take measures to prevent severe floods and tackle other natural disasters, in order to minimize crop loss.

First, the early warning system against, and monitoring of, disasters need to be strengthened. Economic and human losses can be minimized by dividing the areas, categorizing the types of disasters, strengthening the response system and contingency plans, increasing the reserves of relief materials and technical preparations, and issuing timely warnings against natural disasters.

Second, it is important to form scientific and technological support groups, and expert guidance teams in order to launch targeted and efficient rescue and relief operations in disaster-hit areas, and safeguard agricultural production.

And third, pest and disease control should be strengthened. For example, the mechanism to issue early warnings against major pests and diseases such as the fall armyworm in corn fields and migratory pests in paddy fields should be strengthened, and efficient preventive measures implemented to minimize the damage caused by pests and diseases, so as to ensure food security.

The views don't necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

WORLD

Strong opposition voiced over submarine program

100 academics call on Australian PM to rethink plan as it may compound nation's strategic risks

By **KARL WILSON** in Sydney
karlwilson@chinadailyapac.com

Many Australians continue to be puzzled by why their country is embarking on its most expensive military program, forecast to cost $368 billion.

A lot has been said and written about the government's decision to go ahead with developing a nuclear submarine program in a country that has no background in building, maintaining or even crewing nuclear submarines.

Australia has difficulty crewing its small fleet of six aging diesel electric Collins class submarines.

It is all part of the AUKUS strategic partnership comprising Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States and agreed to by former Australian prime minister Scott Morrison in 2021.

Under the program Australia will eventually get eight nuclear powered submarines, the details of which are sketchy at best.

Australia's mainstream media, which has largely promoted an alleged China threat, has been quick to accept the line from military and security agencies that Australia faces increasing security risks, and that this makes the program vitally important for Australia's security.

The perceived risk being China is without any evidence, except that it is expanding its military capability and spending more, which should be otherwise deemed normal because of its expanding trade routes.

The US spent $877 billion on defense last year, more than the next 10 countries, including China, combined, the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute in Sweden said. In addition, the Australian media has all but ignored Japan raising its military budget more than 26 percent this year over last year, compared with China's rise of 7.2 percent.

For many Australians facing a rising cost of living and unaffordable rents, this massive outlay for eight submarines makes no sense economically, politically or even geopolitically.

It is against this background that more than 100 Australian academics wrote an open letter to the current Labor Prime Minister, Anthony Albanese, calling on the government to rethink the entire nuclear submarine plan. The letter was published in The Guardian on Wednesday.

Apart from the expense, the project has not been adequately explained to the Australian people, and it is likely to "compound Australia's strategic risks, heighten political tensions and undermine efforts at nuclear nonproliferation", they said.

Multiple downsides

The program also puts Australia at odds with its neighbors, distracts the country from tackling climate change and increases the risk of nuclear war in the region, they said.

One of the signatories to the letter is David Goodman, professor and director of the China Studies Centre at the University of Sydney.

"I added my name to the letter because I don't see what useful purpose this project has for Australia, its security or regional security for that matter," Goodman said. "The whole thing makes no sense whatsoever."

The project was done in secret, he said.

"Nothing was discussed in public. Apart from that I doubt we will ever see this project get off the ground. All you need is a change in government in the United States, and that administration may not want us (despite being a close ally) to have the technology."

The media (in Australia) is pushing "very hard" for the project, he said.

"But why? If you look at the numbers they just don't add up."

China's defense spending (about 1.2 percent of GDP) is nothing compared with what the US spent last year (4 percent), Goodman said.

"The whole thing is a joke."

The open letter, which has now been circulated throughout Australia, says AUKUS will come at a huge financial cost to Australians, and there is no guarantee of its success.

"Australia's defense autonomy will only be further eroded because of AUKUS. All of this will be done to support the primacy of an ally whose position in Asia is more fragile than commonly assumed, and whose domestic politics is increasingly unstable."

The letter quotes Peter Varghese, former head of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, as saying: "AUKUS is too momentous a decision to be left to the 'echo chamber' of classified discussions. It demands a yet to be had 'proper and forensic public discussion about other options and their underlying rationale'."

In an address to the National Press Club in Canberra in March, the former Australian prime minister Paul Keating said: "The Albanese government's complicity in joining with Britain and the United States in a tripartite build of a nuclear submarine for Australia under the AUKUS arrangements represents the worst international decision by an Australian Labor government since the former Labor leader Billy Hughes sought to introduce conscription to augment Australian forces in World War I."

Signing Australia up to "the foreign proclivities of another country — the United States, with the gormless Brits in their desperate search for relevance, lunging along behind — is not a pretty sight", he said.

Jane Golley, professor and economist at the Crawford School of Public Policy at the Australian National University in Canberra, and a China specialist, also signed the letter.

"I'm not a security or defense expert," she said. "But I listen to experts such as Hugh White."

White, an emeritus professor at the ANU, is one of Australia's leading experts on defense and security and has been an outspoken critic of AUKUS.

"It is incredibly expensive and unlikely to deliver the defense benefits that its proponents claim," Golley said.

Stunning discovery

Mostafa Waziri, head of Egypt's Supreme Council of Antiquities, showcases a colorful mummy coffin during a news conference in Saqqara necropolis, south of capital Cairo, on Saturday. The Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities also announced the discovery of two ancient embalming workshops for humans and animals along with two tombs and a collection of artifacts. The workshops date back to the 30th Dynasty (380-343 BC) and the Ptolemaic periods (305-30 BC), while the tombs are from the Old and New Kingdoms. SUI XIANKAI / XINHUA

WORLD

Editor's note: *The White House and Republicans have reached an "agreement in principle" to raise the US debt ceiling to avert a possible default amid partisan rancor and deep global concerns. This page looks at the gains and losses for both sides and the next hurdle the government needs to clear.*

A security official stands guard near the US Capitol in Washington last week. The White House and Republicans on Saturday reached an "agreement in principle" to raise the debt ceiling to avert a possible default. NATHAN HOWARD / VIA GETTY IMAGES

White House, Republicans reach deal on debt limit

Tentative agreement still needs to tread difficult path in Congress

By AI HEPING in New York
aiheping@chinadailyusa.com

The White House and Republican negotiators have reportedly reached an agreement in principle to raise the US debt limit for two years, amid a deep partisan divide and a difficult path it has to pass through Congress.

The two sides agreed to cut and cap some government spending over the same period to raise the country's $31.4 trillion debt ceiling by June 5 to avert a potentially catastrophic default, dragging the United States back from the precipice of default.

However, when the deal was announced on Saturday it was done without fanfare, in terms that reflected the bitter tenor of the negotiations and the difficult path it has to pass through Congress before the US runs out of money to pay its debts, Reuters reported.

The agreement includes spending cuts demanded by Republicans, but it is short of the reductions in the sweeping legislation passed by the Republican-led House last month, The Associated Press reported.

It came after the credit rating agency Fitch announced last week that it had placed the US AAA-rated long-term foreign-currency issuer default rating on a "negative watch" as the debt ceiling crisis unfolded.

The deal agreed to would, in effect, freeze federal spending and had the approval of President Joe Biden and the House of Representatives Speaker Kevin McCarthy, according to The New York Times, The Washington Post and Politico. The two spoke by phone on Saturday evening to resolve final sticking points, White House sources said.

Any deal still faces tough votes in the House and Senate before June 5, when the Treasury is projected to run out of money to pay its obligations. As the Treasury Department's remaining funds dwindle, investors continue preparing for what would be an unprecedented government failure to meet its financial obligations.

Passage in the House where Republicans hold a narrow majority is not a sure thing because very conservative GOP members had demanded significantly larger budget cuts in return for lifting the borrowing limit and could reject the agreement.

Biden spoke earlier on Saturday with Democratic leaders in Congress, according to media reports. He was expected to be at the presidential retreat Camp David, Maryland, until Sunday and then at his home in Wilmington, Delaware.

McCarthy told reporters on Saturday morning that negotiators had made progress toward a deal, but "are not there yet".

"I'm not fearful of this bill. Now is it everything I wanted? No, it has to pass the Senate and get signed by the president."

Deadline extended

Earlier there had been indications that negotiators were closing in on a deal. On Friday, US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen extended the deadline for raising the federal debt limit, saying the government would default on its obligations if Congress did not increase the country's $31.4 trillion debt ceiling by June 5. Yellen had previously said a default could happen as early as June 1.

The June 1 deadline meant that on June 2 the government would be unable to pay about $25 billion in Social Security payments for the oldest recipients of payments, those 88 years old.

It was widely reported that the deal would suspend the debt limit until January 2025, allowing next year's presidential election not to be troubled by the debt ceiling issue.

However, it was unclear whether the agreement would win enough support in Congress.

The debt ceiling has been modified 102 times since World War II, according to the US Congressional Research Service.

The long standoff on raising the debt ceiling has spooked financial markets, weighing on stocks and forcing the US to pay record-high interest rates in some bond sales. A default would take a far heavier toll, economists say, probably pushing the country into recession, shaking the world economy, and leading to a rise in unemployment.

Bankers were pinning their hopes on the debt ceiling impasse being resolved without significant dislocation to markets, but warned that this is a risky strategy.

"Credit markets are pricing in a resolution in Washington, so if that is not delivered by early next week we are likely to see some volatility," Maureen O'Connor, global head of high-grade debt syndicate at Wells Fargo, told Reuters.

"That said, many investment-grade companies preempted this risk, which is why we saw such an active May calendar."

An estimated 67 million people receive Social Security benefits each month. At $1 trillion a year, the entitlement program accounts for 16 percent of the country's annual spending, making it the largest federal benefits program. Almost two-thirds of beneficiaries rely on Social Security for half of their income, and for 40 percent of recipients, the payments constitute at least 90 percent of their income, according to the National Committee to Preserve Social Security and Medicare. The average benefit for retired workers is $1,827 a month this year.

"That check keeps me going," said a woman aged 80 who lives in New Jersey and wished to remain anonymous. She uses her Social Security payment to pay rent and "to make sure the refrigerator is full", she said.

All the 60 or so people in the apartment building in which she lives are older than 70 and depend on their monthly Social Security payment. "We count on it being put in our checking account or in the mailbox, and on time. But maybe not now. The shelves in my refrigerator would have little on them without it."

In a letter to Congress, Yellen said Social Security and Medicare recipients and veterans will be paid more than $130 billion of scheduled payments in the first two days of June.

However, she also said that during the week of June 5 Treasury is due to make an estimated $92 billion of payments and transfers, including quarterly adjustments of about $36 billion, toward Social Security and Medicare trust funds, but she wrote "our projected resources would be inadequate to satisfy all of these obligations".

Various media reports said the spending deal under discussion made progress on a two-year agreement to cap spending and raise the borrowing limit, extending it past next year's elections, and would include increases for the military and veterans.

Sticking point

One big sticking point appeared to be a Republican effort to expand existing work requirements for recipients of food stamps and other federal aid programs, a longtime Republican goal that Democrats have strongly opposed.

Biden has indicated he will not consider a GOP proposal to impose new work requirements for Medicaid, a healthcare program for low-income and disabled people. Asked on Friday if he would bow to Republican demands on work requirements, Biden said, "I don't bow to anybody," and the White House put out a statement calling proposed requirements cruel and ineffective.

Louisiana Representative Garret Graves, who has been taking part in the talks, said there was "not a chance" that Republicans may give in on the work requirements issue.

"It comes down to whether or not we're going to default on the American debt, we're going to default on seniors on Social Security or Medicare or have the Democrats continue to say we're going to prioritize welfare payments for people that are refusing to work," he said.

The Republican proposal on work requirements would save $11 billion over 10 years by raising the maximum age for existing standards that require able-bodied adults who do not live with dependents to work or attend training programs.

Current law applies those standards to recipients under the age of 50. The Republican plan would raise the age to include adults 55 and under. It would lower the number of exemptions that states can grant to some recipients subject to those requirements.

If new work requirements are in a deal Biden could lose support from progressive Democrats, making the agreement harder to pass in the narrowly divided House of Representatives. Progressive lawmakers and members of the Congressional Black Caucus have indicated they would probably vote against a bill that strengthens work requirements.

Pressure is on McCarthy from the House's conservative members not to give in to any deal, even if it means blowing past the June 5 deadline.

Also, up for discussion is rescinding some of the $80 billion Congress approved last year to expand the Internal Revenue Service, which the agency had planned to use to boost tax enforcement and modernize its technology. Republicans voted earlier this year to take back most of the money, which would increase the budget deficit because it would shrink tax revenue.

Democrats say the money is needed so the government can reverse a decade of attrition at the tax agency, hiring thousands of new auditors and directing them at high-income households and large corporations. Republicans are against the additional IRS money, saying the agency cannot be trusted and that more audits would ultimately burden small businesses and middle-income citizens.

Agencies and Xinhua contributed to this story.

A homeless man warms up a piece of doughnut over a bonfire he set to keep warm in Los Angeles on Feb 14. JAE C. HONG / AP

House Speaker Kevin McCarthy speaks with members of the press about debt talks on Capitol Hill on Saturday. PATRICK SEMANSKY / AP

Mounting burden

The debt limit — also known as the debt ceiling — is not in the US Constitution or in any of its 27 Amendments. It is just a statute, a law, enacted as part of legislation allowing the government to issue bonds to finance US participation in World War I in 1917.

The total debt accumulated by the US government has been growing with each budget deficit since the 1700s. The current limit, set in 2021, is $31.4 trillion.

The initial limit was a few billion dollars, but not enough. So Congress raised it. Congress raised it again. And again. In 1939, anticipating US entry into World War II, Congress restructured the debt and raising the limit became more or less routine.

Since 1960, the limit has been lifted 78 times. Democrats have been in the White House for 30 of those years and worked with Congress to get 29 of those increases. Republican presidents have done it 49 times. For most of that time, raising or suspending the limit was just the last stitch in the federal budget and spending process.

The limit and the debt neared the trillion-dollar level for the first time late in the 1970s. Ronald Reagan made that a major campaign issue in 1980, but while he was in office the limit was raised more than a dozen times and reached $2.8 trillion.

In 1990, under president George H.W. Bush, the limit was set at more than $4 trillion, making the 1980s the decade with the biggest percentage increase in debt and the debt limit.

Under Bill Clinton, the limit went to about $6 trillion (1997) and under George W. Bush to roughly $11 trillion (2008). The last time a new limit was set under president Barack Obama it was $18 trillion (2015) and the last time under president Donald Trump it was $22 trillion (March 2019). During the pandemic, Congress suspended the limit so as to spend without even minimal restraint. The debt rose to more than $27 trillion. The current limit was set in 2021.

AI HEPING

What's in, what's out for Democrats and GOP

WASHINGTON — US President Joe Biden and House Speaker Kevin McCarthy have reached an agreement in principle on legislation to increase the nation's borrowing authority and avoid a default.

Negotiators are now racing to finalize the bill's text. McCarthy said the House will vote on the legislation on Wednesday, giving the Senate time to consider it ahead of the June 5 deadline to avoid a possible default.

While many details are unknown, both sides will be able to point to some victories. But some conservatives expressed early concerns that the deal doesn't cut future deficits enough, while Democrats have been worried about proposed changes to work requirements in programs such as food stamps.

Here's a look at what's in and out of the deal, based on what's known so far.

The agreement would keep nondefense spending roughly flat in the 2024 fiscal year and increase it by 1 percent the following year, as well as provide for a two-year debt-limit increase — past the next presidential election in 2024. That's according to a source familiar with the deal who provided details on the condition of anonymity.

Republicans had proposed boosting work requirements for able-bodied adults without dependents in certain government assistance programs. They said it would bring more people into the workforce, who would then pay taxes and help shore up key entitlement programs, namely Social Security and Medicare.

Democrats had roundly criticized the proposed changes, saying they would lead to fewer people being able to afford food or healthcare without actually increasing job participation.

House Republicans had passed legislation that would create new work requirements for some Medicaid recipients, but that was left out of the final agreement.

However, the agreement would expand some work requirements for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program formerly known as food stamps. The agreement would raise the age for existing work requirements from 49 to 54, similar to the Republican proposal, but those changes would expire in 2030. And the White House said it would at the same time reduce the number of vulnerable people of all ages who are subject to the requirements.

Republicans had sought to repeal Biden's efforts to waive $10,000 to $20,000 in debt for nearly all borrowers who took out student loans. But the provision was a nonstarter for Democrats. The budget agreement keeps Biden's student loan relief in place, though the Supreme Court will have the ultimate say on the matter.

The Supreme Court is dominated 6-3 by conservatives, and those justices' questions in oral arguments showed skepticism about the legality of Biden's student loans plan. A decision is expected before the end of June.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

WORLD

Briefly

SUDAN

Army chief asks UN to dismiss envoy

Sudan's army chief Abdel Fattah al-Burhan demanded in a letter to the United Nations secretary-general that the UN special envoy Volker Perthes be removed, officials said on Saturday. Antonio Guterres said he was "shocked" by Burhan's letter, which requested "the nomination of a replacement" to Perthes and accused him of committing "fraud and disinformation" in facilitating a political process, which led to six weeks of devastating urban warfare. Also on Saturday, the Rapid Support Forces said it is willing to discuss the possibility of extending a cease-fire agreement with the Sudanese army that is due to expire on Monday.

INDIA

Official drains dam to retrieve phone

A government official in India has been suspended from his job after he ordered a water reservoir to be drained so he could retrieve his smartphone, which he had dropped while taking a selfie. Food inspector Rajesh Vishwas dropped his Samsung smartphone in the Kherkatta dam in the central Indian state of Chhattisgarh last week. Vishwas first asked local divers to jump into the reservoir to find the device, claiming it contained sensitive government data. But after initial efforts to retrieve his smartphone failed, he asked for the reservoir to be emptied using diesel pumps. Over the next three days more than 2 million liters of water were pumped out of the reservoir. The smartphone was eventually retrieved.

SERBIA

Vucic steps down as head of ruling party

Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic stepped down as the leader of his party on Saturday after more than a decade at the helm, but he is widely expected to remain the most powerful political figure in the country. Vucic's Serbian Progressive Party won parliamentary elections by a landslide last year. The 53-year-old, who has served as SNS chief since 2012 and has held the position of either Serbia's president or prime minister since 2014, said that while he was stepping down as leader, he will not leave the party he helped found.

UNITED KINGDOM

Travelers face long waits amid tech snag

Travelers arriving in the UK faced delays of hours on Saturday after a technical problem shut electronic border gates at airports across the country, forcing everyone to have their passports checked manually on what was expected to be one of the busiest travel weekends of the year. The Home Office, the government agency responsible for immigration and borders, said it was working to correct a "nationwide border system issue", though it provided no details about what caused the problem.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

Green protest

Police officers intervene as activists from the Extinction Rebellion group stage a protest demanding an end to the use of fossil fuels, in The Hague, the Netherlands, on Saturday. ABDULLAH ASIRAN / VIA GETTY IMAGES

Spain's PM faces key test in local elections

MADRID — Spaniards went to the polls on Sunday to pick thousands of city and regional representatives in a vote seen as the bellwether of a general election in December that will pit Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez against right-wing Popular Party, or PP, leader Alberto Nunez Feijoo.

The stakes were high for Sanchez, whose Socialist Party governs the eurozone's fourth-largest economy in coalition with the far-left Podemos.

Voters were to cast their ballots for mayors in 8,131 municipalities across the country while also electing leaders and assemblies in 12 of Spain's 17 regions — 10 of which are currently run by the Socialists.

Voting opened at 9 am local time and was set to close at 8 pm with about 35.5 million voters eligible to cast ballots in the local elections and 18.3 million eligible to vote in the regional elections.

Spain does not issue exit polls, with the initial results due out at about 10 pm.

If the left "exceeds expectations and manages to retain control of most regional governments in play ... this would suggest the national elections will be very closely fought, and bode well for the left's chances of staying in power," Eurasia Group analyst Federico Santi said last week.

But if the polls — which forecast a shift to the right — were correct, success at a regional level would provide opposition leader Alberto Nunez Feijoo, head of the PP, with the momentum he needs to win the end-of-year election, Santi said.

Sunday's vote found Sanchez, in office since 2018, at several disadvantages.

Soaring inflation

He faced voter fatigue with his government, soaring inflation — even though the rate is lower in Spain than other EU nations — and the resulting fall in purchasing power.

He has also struggled to contain the fallout from repeated crises that have shaken his left-wing coalition.

Feijoo did everything in his power to turn the elections into a national referendum on Sanchez.

In campaigning, he denounced the prime minister as not only pandering to the far left, but also to the Basque and Catalan separatist parties on which his minority government has relied for parliamentary support to push its reforms through.

"I have come to ask for the votes from Spain that want to overthrow 'Sanchismo' this coming Sunday," Feijoo said as he closed his campaign on Friday night, using a derogatory term for Sanchez's policies.

In his closing remarks, Sanchez focused on his government's record in bolstering the economy, fighting a drought and managing Spain's water resources, an increasingly important issue as climate change gathers pace.

"Social democratic policies suit Spain a lot better than neoliberal policies, because we manage the economy a lot better," he said.

The number of regions that the PP manages to wrest from the Socialists will be important in determining the public perception of whether Feijoo has won this first round — and whether his election as premier at the year's end is a foregone conclusion.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

Putin orders stronger border security

MOSCOW/KYIV — Russian President Vladimir Putin on Sunday ordered stronger border security to ensure a fast Russian military as Ukraine reported the "largest drone attack" in Kyiv since the conflict began.

Congratulating the border service, a branch of Russia's Federal Security Service, on their Border Guard Day holiday, Putin said their task was to "reliably cover" lines near the combat zone.

Attacks inside Russia have been growing in intensity in recent weeks, chiefly with drone strikes on regions along the border but increasingly also deep into the country, including on an oil pipeline northwest of Moscow, on Saturday.

"It is necessary to ensure the fast movement of both military and civilian vehicles and cargo, including food, humanitarian aid and building materials sent to the new subjects of the (Russian) Federation," Putin said in a message posted on the Kremlin's Telegram messaging channel.

As the Ukrainian capital prepared to celebrate the anniversary of its founding on Sunday, Ukrainian officials said Russia unleashed multiple waves of airstrikes on Kyiv overnight.

In what appeared to be the "largest drone attack" since the conflict began and the 14th attack since the start of the month, officials said air defense systems downed at least 40 drones moving toward Kyiv.

The predawn attacks came on the last Sunday of May, when the capital celebrates Kyiv Day, the anniversary of its official founding 1,541 years ago. The day is typically marked by street fairs, live concerts and special museum exhibitions — plans for which have been made this year too, but on a smaller scale.

Kremlin did not respond to the attacks.

In a separate development, Russian forces intercepted two long-range Storm Shadow cruise missiles supplied to Ukraine by Britain, Russia's Defense Ministry said on Saturday.

The ministry also said it had intercepted shorter-range US-built HIMARS-launched and HARM missiles, and shot down 12 drones in the previous 24 hours.

Russia did not specify where the interceptions had taken place, but made the announcement in its daily defense ministry briefing.

Ukraine's Ministry of Defence did not immediately respond to a request for comment. Ukrainian officials have previously said that Western-supplied weapons would be used exclusively against Russian forces inside Ukraine.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

Turkiye goes to vote again in poll runoff

Erdogan seeks third term after failing to secure outright victory in first round

ANKARA — Voters in Turkiye returned to the polls on Sunday to decide whether the country's longtime leader President Recep Tayyip Erdogan stretches his rule into a third decade or is unseated by a challenger.

Erdogan, who has been at Turkiye's helm for 20 years, was favored to win a new five-year term in the second-round runoff after coming just short of an outright victory in the first round on May 14.

The longtime leader who turned his country into a geopolitical player finished four percentage points ahead of Kemal Kilicdaroglu, the candidate of a six-party alliance and leader of Turkiye's center-left main opposition party. Erdogan's performance came despite inflation and the effects of a devastating earthquake three months ago.

Kilicdaroglu, 74, had described the runoff as a referendum on the country's future.

More than 64 million people were eligible to cast ballots. The polls opened at 8 am. Turkiye does not have exit polls, and unofficial results were expected about at 9 pm, voting closed at 5 pm.

The final decision could have implications far beyond Ankara because Turkiye stands at the crossroads of Europe and Asia, and it plays a key role in NATO.

Turkiye vetoed Sweden's application to join the alliance and bought Russian missile-defense systems, which prompted the United States to oust Turkiye from a US-led fighter jet project. Erdogan's government helped broker a crucial deal that allowed Ukrainian grain shipments and averted a global food crisis.

In the election on May 14, 87 percent of the electorate cast ballots, and strong participation was expected again on Sunday.

If Erdogan, 69, wins he could remain in power until 2028. After three stints as prime minister and two as president, the leader who heads the conservative Justice and Development Party, or AKP, is already Ankara's longest-serving leader.

The May 14 election was the first that Erdogan did not win outright.

In an effort to woo voters hit hard by inflation, he has increased wages and pensions and subsidized electricity and gas bills, while showcasing Turkiye's homegrown defense industry and infrastructure projects. He also centered his reelection campaign on a promise to rebuild quake-stricken areas, including building 319,000 homes within the year. Many see him as a source of stability.

Kilicdaroglu is a former public servant who has led the Republican People's Party since 2010. He campaigned on a promise to restore the economy by reverting to more conventional policies and to improve ties with the West.

Issue of refugees

In a frantic effort to reach out to voters in the runoff, Kilicdaroglu vowed to repatriate refugees.

Many in Turkiye regard Syrian refugees who have been under Turkiye's temporary protection after fleeing the war in neighboring Syria as a burden on the country, and their repatriation became a key issue in the election.

Erdogan received the endorsement of the third-place candidate Sinan Ogan, a nationalist who garnered 5.2 percent of the votes and was eliminated from the race. A staunchly anti-migrant party that had supported Ogan's candidacy announced it would back Kilicdaroglu.

Erdogan's AKP and its allies retained a majority of seats in parliament following a legislative election that was also held on May 14. Parliamentary elections were not repeated on Sunday.

AGENCIES—XINHUA

A voter casts his ballot during the second round of the presidential election in Istanbul on Sunday. DILARA SENKAYA / REUTERS

Iraqi workers engaged in the construction of a school undertaken by China Electric Power Construction Group in Baghdad on April 9. XINHUA

China-proposed BRI helping to rebuild Iraq, experts say

BAGHDAD — Aqil Hamdan, a professor at Baghdad-based Al-Mustansiriyah University, said China could play a vital role in Iraq's postwar reconstruction, particularly through the China-proposed Belt and Road Initiative.

Saying infrastructure in Iraq was dilapidated after decades of wars, sanctions, and economic woes, the professor believed "Chinese companies can meet Iraq's urgent need for foreign investment, technology, and equipment" to restore its economy.

"We need the BRI, for it is a project that builds roads and bridges and promotes development in industrial and medical areas, as well as in residential cities," Hamdan said, noting Western countries illegally invaded and occupied his country whereas China brings an answer to prosperity.

"China does not occupy any country," Hamdan said, stressing that China develops relations with other countries based on "mutual benefit and common destiny".

> "We need the BRI, for it is a project that builds roads and bridges and promotes development in industrial and medical areas, as well as in residential cities."
>
> **Aqil Hamdan,** a professor of Baghdad-based Al-Mustansiriyah University

Calling Iraq "a natural partner of China" due to its central location on the ancient Silk Road, Hamdan said cooperation between China and Iraq can "promote the connectivity of Asian, European and African continents".

Hamdan is also an active member of a local nongovernmental organization called The Popular Movement of the Belt and Road Initiative and the Port of Al-Faw, which supports Chinese investment in the country's Al-Faw Grand Port project.

Being active in 15 of Iraq's 18 provinces, the organization's members include former government officials, scholars, entrepreneurs and workers.

Anwar al-Bahadli, another member of the organization, who once worked at the Iraqi embassy in Beijing for four years, described China's achievements since joining the World Trade Organization in 2001 as "qualitative breakthroughs".

He said: "Iraq must take the 'Chinese train of growth' as it is the best solution to tackle its own problems."

The BRI was put forward in 2013, seeking to connect Asia with Africa and Europe via land and maritime networks to improve regional integration, increase trade and stimulate economic growth.

Ten years on, the initiative has developed into a beacon of economic growth with more than 150 countries and over 30 international organizations signing cooperation documents under the BRI framework.

Haider al-Rubaie, head of the Iraqi-Chinese Friendship Association, hailed the BRI as "a joint development initiative that helps the world to achieve justice, peace and security".

He noted that more and more Chinese entrepreneurs have come to invest in Iraq and more fruits are expected to be borne in bilateral cooperation.

XINHUA

Outdoor economy thrives as more people step out

Camping sites, sports take center stage in tourism revival

A camper plays with her dog in Yantai, Shandong province, on July 25. TANG KE / FOR CHINA DAILY

By WANG ZHUOQIONG
wangzhuoqiong@chinadaily.com.cn

More people are taking to hiking in the mountains or setting up campsites this summer, as they seek to stay healthy, beat everyday stress and foster ecological awareness.

This is creating more opportunities for the outdoor economy, including recreational tourism and outdoor sports.

Zhang Xingyu, 36, who grew up near the mountains of his hometown in Zunyi, Guizhou province, came to Shanghai in 2006 to study at the Shanghai Jiaotong University and has worked in the automobile industry there ever since.

Last year, memories of outdoor activities — catching fish and shrimp at a stream after school hours — came flooding back when Zhang, now the father of a four-year-old boy, went camping.

"Suddenly, I remembered what it was like to be a part of nature, in the fresh air and open spaces," Zhang said. "Camping has enriched our family life and brought us closer as father and son."

"To make fire with wooden sticks that I myself had sharpened was a real joy," he says. "People become more agile outdoors."

Since then, Zhang's family and friends have gathered almost every weekend to camp near the mountains or climb them. An outdoor gadgets collector, Zhang has spent almost 100,000 yuan ($14,159) on camping equipment, and a similar amount on clothing and shoes. "Every trip is a chance to discover something new to make our trip better," he says.

Many outdoor tracking routes and tourism destinations saw explosive growth of visitors during the May Day holiday, said Yu Ge, founder of Oasis Outdoor, an outdoor tourism company in Beijing.

"If in the past three years, camping was about parks and suburbs, in the first five months of this year, it is about setting up tents and traveling to farther destinations and tourism sites, such as Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region and Yunnan province," he said.

According to data from Ctrip, China's leading online tourism agency, reservations for camping tourism products climbed more than 100 percent in March compared to the prior month.

The popularity of camping and outdoor sports tourism has been most visible in big cities and hot tourist spots such as Shanghai, Sanya of Hainan province, and Guangzhou and Shenzhen in Guangdong province.

Qian Teng, 37, a former executive at an international hospitality chain who now owns a homestay in Miyun district of Beijing, said his business has been booming over the past three years as Beijing residents would stay there and go on fishing, hiking and mountain climbing expeditions.

Qian goes hiking with his daughter Qian Yuehan, 7, to the Great Wall and nearby mountains in Beijing during weekends. Four tents, including MSR, Hilleberg and The Free Spirits, two cookers, several alpenstocks and sleeping bags that he uses on various trips, are his favorite outdoor equipment.

"Outdoor tourism in China is still in its infancy, yet it has great potential," Qian says. "The younger generation, who face a lot of pressure from work and life, will find outdoor adventure a relaxation."

Qian is also full of praise for outdoor sports.

Different from other sports activities where people spend two to three hours playing, outdoor activities often take one or two days, he says.

"Great ideas often come to me after I've spent a day climbing or hiking in the hills, taking in the beautiful views," he says.

Chinese consumers' newfound passion for outdoor sports and lifestyles has encouraged more brands to innovate and develop apparel and equipment for the outdoors.

Athletic apparel and equipment brand Lululemon has developed a hiking collection for the Chinese market. On May 23, Lululemon launched its first road-to-trail running shoe, Blissfeel trail, which offers greater traction and durability with an upper featuring a protective film and a rugged out sole for enhanced grip.

Top: Competitors engage in a Frisbee competition at the sports ground of Jinhua Polytechnic, a career college, in Jinhua, Zhejiang province, on April 22. HU XIAOFEI / FOR CHINA DAILY
Above: Cyclists ride along the beautiful west coast of Binhai Road in Haikou, Hainan province, on May 7. SU BIKUN / FOR CHINA DAILY

"Since the COVID-19 pandemic, more people began to go outdoors, and our Hike collection has been welcomed by our Chinese guests well, seeing faster growth in our total Play category," the company said.

According to a Mintel survey, consumers in China who choose professional outdoor sports brands are more concerned about the environment. They use outdoor sports gear more frequently in their daily life, and are more interested in socializing through outdoor activities. Outdoor sportswear should strike a balance between functionality and fashionable design, the survey report said.

Beneunder, a lifestyle clothing and equipment producer based in Shenzhen, Guangdong province, has extended traditional outdoor products to urban occasions to reach more consumers.

"The outdoor economy is on the rise, with a shortage being discovered between wild outdoor spaces and urban centers," the company said. "Not everyone is about to climb the snow mountains, but a short trip to the city's outskirts to play Frisbee or just go into tents also creates an outdoor experience."

Based on these insights, the company has developed lightweight outdoor apparel, shoes and equipment for young city dwellers. It invested 632 million yuan in the first half of 2022 on research and development of scientific technologies including anti-cold, anti-fatigue and anti-heat technologies.

Sales of its folded sunglasses grew 1,300 percent year-on-year in the first six months of 2022, contributing to 7.1 percent of its overall revenues. During the May Day holiday, its retail stores saw a sales surge, with those at tourism hot spots like Chengdu, Sichuan province and Kunming, Yunnan province, topping the list.

The camping economy has found greater support from government policies.

In November, the Development Plan for Outdoor Sports Industry 2022-2025 was issued by eight ministries, including the General Administration of Sports. It showed that by 2025, the country would have an outdoor sports industry valued at more than 3 trillion yuan, and build more than 10,000 camping sites for outdoor sports.

A guideline issued by 14 ministries, including the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, has supported the orderly development of camping tourism and leisure activities.

Despite the high-speed development of the camping market since 2020, its penetration rate is merely 3 percent, according to iiMedia Research. The ratio is more than 10 percent in markets where there is a much longer history of camping and outdoor activities, such as in Japan and the United States, it said.

Li Jiqin, head of e-commerce of Mobi Garden, a producer of outdoor gear and clothing, said eight out of 10 users of camping products are new to the field.

The company has developed entry-level products, such as tent canopies, tables and chairs, as well as trolleys. He said new activities such as park camping, car camping and hike camping are being adopted now.

"We are optimistic about the market this year given the rising number of newcomers and the demand for more camping products from senior players," said Li.

Yu of Oasis Outdoor said the recovery seen in domestic and international tourism has had an impact on the camping market, offsetting its growth. Yet, demand for weekend trips and family outdoor leisure activities is still strong.

The camping industry, he said, will see a return to rational growth after the earlier high-growth phase.

"The sector is expected to see more steady growth as residential incomes improve and the number of cars increase, creating a high-quality and more regulated industry," Yu said.

Smaller-sized or poorly managed camping sites will be the first to go, Yu said, adding: "Only those who are truly passionate about the industry will survive."

He said a diversified business model and well-designed support infrastructure would boost the camping industry and meet the needs of a more fragmented market.

"Outdoor industry is still a niche sector, which requires knowledge of processes and advanced equipment," said Yu.

Yu said qualified outdoor guides and professionals who have certifications and on-site training for at least two years are in great demand.

A shortage of professionals has often led to safety issues in outdoor activities, and these are big hurdles when raising funds for expanding the outdoor tourism industry, he said.

"The healthy development of the outdoor economy should be taken step by step," Yu said.

The hoot of an owl, a glimpse of the moon

REPORTER'S LOG

By WANG ZHUOQIONG

I live next to the Wenyu River in the northern suburb of Beijing. Every weekend, tents and trolleys pop up like mushrooms on both sides of the river.

Along with the tourists intent on camping with their outdoor gadgets, traffic follows, and so do vendors selling snacks, beverages and fruits, and occasionally toys for kids such as kites, Frisbees and trumpets.

Despite the rebound in both domestic as well as overseas travel, camping and outdoor activities have grown as a lifestyle choice for city dwellers.

Meeting family and friends at a park or by the river is a healthy way to spend time during the weekends.

But there are also drawbacks to outdoor tourism.

The tents are often crowded and privacy is a challenge. After the camping party ends, the leftovers remain where they are.

My friend Viviana has posted a short-video on manners for glamping on her account at Xiaohongshu, a social media and lifestyle platform, with suggestions including: "Do not enter the neighbors' tents uninvited. No loud music played after 9 pm. Pick up the garbage while leaving."

We should do more to protect the environment.

Camping gear makers have invested in green products. For instance, stove makers have installed re-collection stations at camping sites, inviting camp visitors to recycle the gas cans for the stoves.

The outdoor tourism sector should also upgrade products and services for travelers who seek better experiences.

Lack of infrastructure for camping sites, such as hot water, toilets, and even garbage cans, has led to poor camping experiences for travelers. This will gradually put people off. Industry players should take greater efforts to do their best, from product functions, to designs and services, and offer an immersive experience for campers.

Camp-goers have quickly evolved from entry-level beginners to sophisticated experts. Sharing their outdoor trips and lifestyles on social media has made travelers look for differentiated and theme-based camping gear and clothing lines. Bushcraft camping is encouraging participants to be more independent and skillful in the wilderness. It can be fun and adventurous, often taking place in remote areas, which means less reliance on camping gear. People are also choosing solo camping for some quiet and peace in the woods.

I cannot complain about my last trip to a camping site in the south of Beijing, as it was well organized.

On the site, there were about 20 tents, each the size of a hotel room. Stepping inside, there were two beds, the carpet installed, air conditioner on, and with sprays to beat mosquitoes.

Once outside, there was a table with four chairs under a giant dome tent. Food was prepared for travelers to barbecue beef and pork. Each tent was equipped with an individual toilet. Several events, such as riding mountain Karting cars, finding hidden vegetables, raising bonfires and watching outdoor movies, filled our day.

The experience was effortless and fun.

I would like to visit the site again during another weekend, just to hear the distant hoot of an owl, glimpse the beautiful moon and smell the wafting smoke from a put-out bonfire.

BUSINESS

Visitors watch and take photos of a model showcasing a sun protection outfit in a street in Changsha, Hunan province, on May 21.
YANG HUAFENG / CHINA NEWS SERVICE

TFS Tents hits high road for discerning adventurers

Qingdao-based outdoor equipment brand shows diverse portfolio to fit camping needs

By **WANG ZHUOQIONG**
wangzhuoqiong@chinadaily.com.cn

During the past three years, as the fashion of going on a camping adventure has developed into a big trend, one domestic tent producer has found its products in high demand, with requests from domestic and other Asian markets.

The Free Spirits Tents, or TFS Tents, an outdoor equipment brand focusing on camping tents based in Qingdao, Shandong province, said lightweight tents for hiking and mountain climbing or designs with individuality have proven even more popular this year.

"Family tent users are more fragmented this year when more people can travel overseas or on long-distance trips," said Wang Jigang, founder of TFS Tents.

Large and heavy tents that can house an entire family and their equipment are no longer the most sold, he added.

Founded in 2011 by Wang, a tent designer, TFS Tents has become popular among outdoor fans and its product was featured in the popular movie *The Wandering Earth* in 2019.

TFS Tents — ranging from leisure camping, backpacking and mountaineering — has four lines of products — the classic series Black Label, the lightweight Blue Label, the Red Label for adventure and the base camp series White Label.

Their Black Label series, designed for mountain climbing and hiking, has grown two to three times in terms of sales volume.

"Nowadays, young travelers have planned trips to renowned mountain climbing or hiking sites and require better quality and designs in outdoor equipment," Wang said.

Individuality and personality are reflected in their demands, he said. For example, many female travelers have asked for pink tents.

The company has a factory of about 70 sewing professionals making handcrafted tents. Having worked for a South Korean tent original design manufacturing factory in Qingdao since 1993, Wang learned many skills. Seven years later, Wang was promoted to learning how to design the tents under a top South Korean designer.

Wang decided on the two most important factors of his business — materials and production. He abandoned the traditional way of paying his workers by how many tents they assembled and adopted the salary method that measures work by the hour so as to improve the quality of each tent.

TFS Tents imports materials from South Korea and Japan, such as DAC tent poles, the highest-performance aluminum tubing from South Korea, which is widely used in extreme environments. Testing and production usually take two years to make one product, he said.

Last year, the company invested more than 1 million yuan ($141,661) in research and development.

In January last year, the company developed a product called the "Cave", in collaboration with Neru Design Works in Japan. The dome-shaped tent is suitable for use in cold environments and has some new design breakthroughs, such as being one of the few TC cotton (polyester cotton blend) spherical tents, and is priced at 14,980 yuan.

Wang attributed the company's success in the outdoor equipment industry to his own passion for camping and outdoor lifestyles, as well as his persistence in aesthetics.

In the era of "glamping" — a word coined from combining glamor and camping — "younger consumers in China have higher demands for designs, which match our strengths", he said. "However, to stand out from the competition requires spending more time on research, testing and communications with users and partners overseas for constant user feedback."

Half of the company's sales are from overseas markets, predominantly from Japan, South Korea and Thailand, said the founder.

Their products adapt to the needs of colors varied by the markets. For example, Japanese consumers are quite fond of earthy tones, whereas the South Korean market tends to prefer stronger colors such as yellow or purple, Wang said.

"A good product is not a product that is good in one or two parts. It is an integrated process. There is no shortcut to being great," said Wang.

Cross-border e-commerce helps small biz exports

CHONGQING — Xie Huan, a staffer of a kitchenware manufacturing firm, had meticulously prepared a pile of company introduction booklets in English for the cross-border e-commerce trade fair held in Southwest China's Chongqing from May 18-21.

"We embarked on cross-border e-commerce business a few years ago," said Xie, who is in charge of the cross-border e-commerce business at Chongqing Deng's Kitchenware Manufacturing Co Ltd, a company with a history spanning more than 100 years in kitchenware manufacturing.

Xie's company is based in Dazu district, Chongqing. Its forging technology has been listed on the city's intangible cultural heritage protection list. Today, its products including kitchen knives, have been exported to the United States, European countries and Southeast Asian nations.

"We hope to attract more international customers and platforms through this event, so that we can expand overseas markets through cross-border e-commerce. We are highly optimistic about our overseas business in the post-pandemic era," said Xie, whose company had set up a booth at the trade fair, a major event of the fifth Western China International Fair for Investment and Trade, which kicked off on May 18.

The fair attracted more than 500 enterprises from home and abroad, along with more than 2,200 purchasing agents.

Chongqing YGM Technology Co Ltd, which specializes in manufacturing gaming mice and keyboards, was one of the participants hoping to unlock cross-border e-commerce business opportunities.

"Cross-border e-commerce provides a crucial channel for our exports. Last year, our export value reached approximately 10 million yuan ($1.42 million), with half of the volume coming from cross-border e-commerce," said Pan Yangang, the company's CEO.

"Cross-border e-commerce is undoubtedly a trend," said Wu Na, a business manager at a technology company, adding the company thrived in the domestic market for 13 years and began to carry out exports in 2020 in partnership with OSELL, a Chongqing-based company dedicated to providing cross-border trade services.

"OSELL helped our products enter the Indonesian market, leading to a significant breakthrough in our export business. Our sales exceeded 8 million yuan in 2020," said Wu.

"We focused on cross-border e-commerce services at the outset, but we have developed more services for our customers including finance and sales channels," said Zeng Jianwen, vice-chairman of OSELL Group. The company says it has over 50 offline service centers in China and has established overseas channel service centers in nearly 30 countries.

Cross-border e-commerce has become a new driving force for China's foreign trade development, and a new channel for enterprises' transformation, upgrading and high-quality development. Meanwhile, an increasing number of small and medium-sized enterprises consider cross-border e-commerce an essential tool to expand their international business.

In 2022, Chongqing's cross-border e-commerce reached 40.7 billion yuan, up 27.9 percent year-on-year, while the figure for the whole country reached 2.11 trillion yuan, up 9.8 percent compared to the previous year.

Recognizing the immense potential of SMEs, many global e-commerce platforms including Amazon, eBay and AliExpress also participated in the fair, seeking cooperation opportunities.

XINHUA

An employee (right) showcases products to visitors during the fifth Western China International Fair for Investment and Trade in Chongqing on May 18. CHEN CHAO / CHINA NEWS SERVICE

BUSINESSINSIGHT

Financial reform will help supervision system

EAGLE EYE

By Peng Xingyun

The National Administration of Financial Regulation, China's new financial regulator, was officially unveiled on May 18, marking another big-ticket reform in the domestic financial sector.

It not only reflects the nation's efforts to establish a regulatory system with Chinese characteristics based on specific practices to build its socialist market economy, but that its financial supervision — an important part of a country's financial governance system — is evolving in accordance with its development of finance.

Before NAFR

For a certain period following the reform and opening-up, China had a unified financial structure, until the early 1990s when the Shanghai and Shenzhen stock exchanges, and later the China Securities Regulatory Commission, were established one after another, ushering in modern financial supervision in the governance system of China's finance sector.

After the establishment of the China Insurance Regulatory Commission in 1998, the China Banking Regulatory Commission was set up in 2003, marking the official start to a separate financial supervision system.

Since then, China has been continually improving supervision within the financial industry, strengthening coordination among regulatory bodies and making up for regulatory shortcomings.

For example, in November 2017, the Financial Stability and Development Committee under the State Council, or China's Cabinet, was established. In 2018, the CBRC and the CIRC merged to establish the China Banking and Insurance Regulatory Commission to uniformly supervise the two industries.

The commission — as the State Council's deliberative and coordinating body for major issues in terms of financial stability, reform and development — held dozens of interministerial meetings between regulators in the years since its establishment before it ceased operating due to the recent reform.

In the years since the establishment of the commission, supervision remained somewhat "decentralized" despite better coordination mechanisms built among various regulatory bodies. It is in view of this that the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China urged measures to regulate all types of financial activities, strive to eliminate regulatory gaps and blind spots, vigorously promote regulatory coordination among central and local governments, and firmly hold the bottom line of no systemic financial risks. This is the fundamental basis for the latest round of reform in financial regulation.

CAI MENG / CHINA DAILY

Significant changes

After the first session of the 14th National People's Congress in early March, there was a brief glimpse into how China's new financial regulatory regime would be presented to the world.

First, a central finance committee, shouldering the original responsibilities of the Financial Stability and Development Committee, was unveiled at this year's two sessions. The newly established committee will ensure top-level design, overall planning, better coordination, holistic development and solid implementation of work plans related to financial stability and development. It will also study and deliberate on major policies and critical issues in the financial sector.

Second, the NAFR, which will function directly under the State Council, has been formed on the basis of the former CBIRC. The responsibilities of the People's Bank of China, the central bank, of conducting routine supervision over financial groups, such as financial holding companies and those related to investor protection of the CSRC, have been transferred to the new administration. The NAFR has now undoubtedly become China's main financial supervisory authority.

Third, CSRC's role in capital market supervision has been enhanced. The responsibility for reviewing corporate bond issuances has been transferred to it from the National Development and Reform Commission. The regulatory situation of China's bond market, which was split in the past, has finally moved toward a unified system.

Finally, reforms in the local financial regulatory system have been advanced.

A local financial supervision system, with special government units dispatched from central financial management departments as the mainstay, will be established. In the past, the local financial departments assumed both some regulatory and service functions, which led many local governments to leverage these departments for more loans from commercial banks, likely compromising financial stability. With the latest redistribution of the central and local financial supervision authority, especially with local financial regulators carrying out just the supervision function, the government's financial supervision responsibilities will be better exerted, which is beneficial for overall financial stability.

The latest reform is the biggest change in China's financial regulatory system since 2003. It is an initiative to adapt to the trend of financial development, not only respecting the internal laws of financial development, but closely combining with the specific practice of China's financial structure, which reflects the innovation in financial supervision.

Knowing the purpose

The fundamental purpose of this financial regulatory reform is to prevent systemic financial risks and effectively protect the rights and interests of financial consumers. In order to better understand this financial regulatory change, it is necessary to clarify the reasons behind it.

First, China has a huge financial market. According to the latest data released by the PBOC in March, by the end of 2022, the total assets of China's financial institutions reached 419.64 trillion yuan ($59.45 trillion), of which those of the banking industry were 379.39 trillion yuan, and of securities and insurance institutions 13.11 trillion yuan and 27.15 trillion yuan, respectively. The total liabilities of financial institutions were 382.33 trillion yuan, of which those of financial institutions in the banking, securities and insurance industries were 348 trillion yuan, 9.89 trillion yuan and 24.45 trillion yuan, respectively.

These data show that financial depth, which captures the financial sector relative to the economy, has reached a fairly high level in China. It also means that once systemic financial risks break out, the real economy will be adversely affected, and so will be the wealth, employment and income of households.

Second, the reform of the regulatory system is a response to new financial market developments. At present, financial institutions are closely connected. Some enterprise groups, for example, have mixed operations of banking, securities and insurance at the group level in the form of various subsidiaries. Different financial institutions, though not related to each other, may also hold bonds issued by each other. Such a phenomenon of cross-penetration has been continuously strengthened with the expansion of the financial scale and the increase of business scope. Additionally, the trend of crosscutting, cross-border competition, and co-innovation and cooperation between various types of financial institutions is becoming increasingly obvious, especially in the field of asset management, forming a new scenario of mutual channel sharing and cross-investment.

Third, the structure of financial products is getting more complex. With the continuous development and enrichment of basic financial instruments and their derivatives, some institutions have recombined different types of such combos and developed a variety of nested structured financial products, leading to a more complex structure of financial products and making financial risks more complex and more contagious.

Fourth, financial risks are not easy to spot. Whether it is the financial institutions as parties or the regulatory authorities, it is difficult to effectively and clearly identify the potential risks in advance, after which financial risks may erupt unexpectedly. This makes it more difficult for governments and central bank to handle. The recent bankruptcy of US' Silicon Valley Bank is a typical case.

Lastly, the reform of financial supervision is a move to adapt to the new development of finance and the new characteristics of financial risks. Preventing systemic financial risks is the primary goal. It is also a key move to protect the rights and interests of financial consumers more effectively. Financial consumers deal with wealth management products, insurance products and various funds. However, many cannot protect themselves due to a disadvantage in acquiring information on time. Their rights and interests may be damaged without better government supervision.

The writer is research fellow of the Institute of Finance & Banking at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences.

The views don't necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

'Economic security' threat to Asia-Pacific

MAIN STREET

By Tang Xinhua

The G7 summit, which concluded on May 21 in Hiroshima, Japan, released a statement in which the seven major economic powers said they would unite to safeguard "economic security" by pushing for "a level playing field for their workers and companies" in dealing with China.

The meeting marks an attempt by the United States to build its China-targeted strategic containment policies through relying on its alliances in the Asia-Pacific region, under the banner of safeguarding "economic security", involving key supply chains, key infrastructure, emerging technology governance, international technical standards and the clean-energy economy.

The goal is to build a new Indo-Pacific security architecture that completely relies on the United States in terms of politics, military, economy, technology and resources, which will severely affect the security and development of the Asia-Pacific region.

"Economic security" is a new excuse by the United States to disrupt China's long-term economic and trade cooperation with other countries.

To further promote its Indo-Pacific Strategy and Indo-Pacific Economic Framework, the United States has, as usual, concocted concepts such as "nonmarket policies" and "economic coercion" to stigmatize the good, long-standing economic and trade cooperation between China and Asian countries. Through such stigmatization, the US also aims to destroy regional multilateral trade cooperative frameworks, such as the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership. To this end, the G7 will launch tools such as the so-called "economic coercion coordination platform" to enhance information sharing and coordination within its alliance.

Building a new supply chain alliance is the basis for the United States to promote "economic security". The Hiroshima summit proposed to build a reliable partnership within and outside the G7 group to strengthen the resilient supply chain network and formulate supply chain principles, such as transparency, diversification, security, sustainability, credibility and reliability, establish the Mineral Safety Partnership, and extend it to non-G7 countries, especially developing countries, to further shape a new supply chain network system and new rules of global trade.

The adjustment of the supply chain system directly affects the pattern of the global value chain — one of the strategic goals of G7-proposed measures to promote "economic security" is actually to squeeze China's position and space in the global value chain.

The United States has taken "economic security" as a new starting point to build alliance partnerships in key strategic areas. Under its Indo-Pacific Strategy, Washington has established regional partnerships, alliances, organizations and rules, and enhanced the collective strength within and beyond the region, so that it can achieve the second major strategic goal of the Indo-Pacific Strategy — connection, or joining hands with its allies to achieve its strategic goals.

The G7 summit, for example, proposed launching the Global Partnership for Infrastructure and Investment to strengthen the security and resilience of critical infrastructure.

Under the concept of "economic security", the United States has wooed some countries in joining its technology alliances. It has further strengthened the CHIP4, and the military technology security cooperation among Australia, the United Kingdom, and the US under their trilateral security partnership (AUKUS).

Washington has also joined hands with its allies in the Indo-Pacific region to promote a "clean economy", referring to clean energy, decarbonization and infrastructure. The United States is strengthening the technical interoperability within the alliance in the Indo-Pacific region and building a new Indo-Pacific security architecture.

The United States has used "economic security" as its new "cloak" to try to dominate the global new technology ecosystem and technology governance system.

The Indo-Pacific region is becoming the core area of the US' strategic competition with China, and tech power-based competition is becoming the pillar of international power tussles. The United States has, under its Indo-Pacific Strategy, vigorously promoted the Indo-Pacific digital strategy, built a common values-based consensus centered on the idea of "democracy", implanted common values of "freedom and openness" in the Indo-Pacific digital space, and established multidimensional and multifunctional technical alliances and partnerships, in an attempt to build a technical rules system featuring a "layered pyramid" of de-Sinicization.

To advance the G7 digital trade agreement, the United States has made efforts to build a digital ecosystem and supply chain. In June 2021, the Carbis Bay G7 Summit communique issued by the G7 summit proposed to establish a trustworthy and values-driven digital ecosystem.

To develop digital technology investment standards to replace China-proposed technology infrastructure, the United States has managed to persuade participants in the Prague conference in 2019 and 2020 to agree on the standards of 5G network security, making those participating countries agree to invest in "reliable and secure" technology and digital infrastructure.

The United States will also take the lead in setting up evaluation frameworks and standards in the Indo-Pacific region to vet digital development projects and promote the implementation of an investment screening plan in relevant countries.

To promote a values-driven digital governance model, the United States also uses financial institutions to implement digital development plans and digital governance models in the Indo-Pacific region.

It is clear that the United States promotes the concept of "economic security" in the Indo-Pacific region mainly with a strategic goal to weaken economic cooperation between countries in the region and China, and gradually establish a new security system based on a "techno-political strategy", so that it can shape an asymmetrical power advantage, security environment, strategic environment and "rules-based" international order.

Given the global challenges and strategic competition risks, the international community must adhere to a common, comprehensive, cooperative and sustainable security philosophy, stick to the principles of the UN Charter and international laws, abandon the Cold-War mentality, oppose unilateralism, and refrain from clique politics and camp confrontation, if it is to step out of the woods.

The writer is a researcher at the Institute of International Relations in Tsinghua University.

The views don't necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

MOTORING

Satisfaction on the rise with offerings from NEV makers

Survey highlights customers' desired features when purchasing models

By LI FUSHENG
lifusheng@chinadaily.com.cn

BYD showcases an NEV platform at the 2023 Shanghai auto show in April. LI FUSHENG / CHINA DAILY

Buyers of new energy vehicles, including electric cars and plug-in hybrids, have found models available in the market more "appealing", according to a J.D. Power study.

This year, the buyers rated NEVs in the Chinese market at 776 on a 1,000-point scale, up 37 points from 2022, according to the China New Energy Vehicle–Automotive Performance, Execution and Layout Study.

It measures NEV owners' emotional attachment to and level of excitement for their new vehicle across 45 attributes in 11 categories ranging from exterior and interior to performance, safety, infotainment and driving comfort.

The company called the progress "significant", saying the result is another sign that the rapid development of the NEV market is now primarily driven by products instead of government policies.

The study polled 7,209 NEV owners who purchased their vehicle between July 2022 and January 2023, involving 76 models from 36 different brands, from January through March this year in 81 cities across China.

A breakdown of the findings shows that international brands performed well, with their average score rising 40 points from 2022 to 784, surpassing Chinese startups at 781.

Chinese startups, including Nio and Xpeng, had scored higher for the previous two years.

Established Chinese brands like Geely also made great progress, with an increase of 42 points from 2022 to 773.

As the overall score gap between them has narrowed to a single digit, it signals that the competition is heating up, said J.D. Power.

Yet despite the international brands' higher average score, it was models from Chinese marques that sat atop the list in the survey, ranging from Geely's Geometry E in the small electric vehicle segment to BYD's Han EV in the compact sedan segment and the Nio ET7 in the premium vehicle segment.

Statistics from the China Passenger Car Association show that NEVs accounted for 56.5 percent of Chinese marques' retail sales in April, but the figure was merely 4.4 percent for major international volume brands, ranging from Volkswagen to Toyota.

Of 11 carmakers whose NEV sales exceeded 10,000 units in April, eight were Chinese, with BYD ranking first, delivering almost 210,000 units in the month, according to the CPCA.

Both traditional brands and startups have scaled up their investment and sped up their pace toward electrification, said Elvis Yang, general manager of auto product practice at J.D. Power China.

"In the increasingly competitive market, it's important to improve the user experience. Automakers need to deeply understand consumers' demand and behavior habits to manufacture more competitive products," said Yang.

At this year's Shanghai auto show in April, almost all international brands showcased their latest NEV models and voiced their determination to speed up product launches.

Yet the study has revealed that Chinese startups have launched new products at a fast pace.

Up to 53 percent of Chinese startups' models last year were newly launched ones, generating 66 percent of their sales revenue. Overall satisfaction with these new models was 788, 14 points higher than its existing models.

J.D. Power said design, fuel economy and driving range were found to be key to the consumer experience.

In this year's study, exterior ranked first in overall satisfaction across 11 categories with a score of 807 and fuel economy and driving range ranked second with 780, which means mileage anxiety is no longer a big problem for NEV drivers.

In contrast, NEV drivers' satisfaction with the infotainment system (764), driving comfort (765) and charging experience (765) improved only slightly from 2022, the study found.

Also, design was found to have become a decisive factor among female buyers, according to the study.

It found that a better exterior was the top reason why female purchasers decided to buy one NEV over another, while the top reason why they did not buy a specific NEV model is that it did not look as good as expected.

As the NEV market gets competitive, some carmakers have chosen their niches.

One example is Ora, the electric vehicle arm of Great Wall Motors. It has labeled itself as a brand that "loves women more", offering exterior colors as well as onboard features that appeal to them.

SAIC-GM-Wuling said its popular Hongguang Mini EV is "tailor-made for young women in tier four-to-five cities and towns".

Battery production energizes potential of Sichuan economy

By LI FUSHENG

83 GWh
of batteries were produced in Sichuan in 2022, accounting for one-sixth of China's total.

400 GWh
of batteries are expected to be produced in Sichuan province by 2025.

Local authorities in Southwest China's Sichuan province are powering up battery production to tap into the strong growth potential of the country's burgeoning new energy vehicle sector.

Jing Maoming, deputy head of the province's department of economy and information, said on Wednesday that the production capacity of Sichuan's power battery sector is expected to reach 400 gigawatt-hours by 2025, with the industrial chain's combined output reaching 500 billion yuan ($70.7 billion).

Jing said 83 GWh of batteries were produced in the province last year, which translates to around one-sixth of China's total. That momentum has continued well into 2023. In the first four months of this year, battery production in the province hit 25 GWh, up 33.3 percent year-on-year, which was above the national average.

Jing presented the figures at a media event heralding the 2023 World Power Battery Conference, to be held June 8-11 in Yibin, Sichuan. More than 320 companies, including CATL, BYD and Mercedes-Benz, have registered to attend the conference, which is expected to further stimulate growth in the sector.

The city of Yibin is one of the leading hosts of Sichuan's power battery industry, along with Chengdu, Suining, Deyang and Meishan.

Liao Wenbin, mayor of Yibin, stated that power battery production in the city reached 72 GWh in 2022, accounting for 80 percent of the province's total. He also said production capacity has reached 150 GWh, with the industrial chain's output expected to reach 120 billion yuan this year.

China's power battery sector has continued to surge, with installation in the first four months reaching 91 GWh, up 41 percent year-on-year, said Miao Changxing, an official at the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology.

Miao said the ministry is developing policies in areas ranging from safety and innovation to recycling in order to boost the sector's further growth.

The rapid development of the sector reflects the rising popularity of new energy vehicles in China and beyond. The China Association of Automobile Manufacturers estimates NEV sales in China are expected to hit 9 million this year, up from 6.88 million in 2022.

The CAAM statistics indicate national sales of NEVs hit 636,000 units in April, up 110 percent year-on-year. Their combined sales in the first four months this year totaled 2.22 million units, up 42.8 percent from the same period last year. Of that number, more than 650,000 were sold in Sichuan province, ranking first among provinces and autonomous regions in western China.

"When it comes to vehicle consumption, Sichuan is the fastest-growing region in western China, with a vast market for new energy vehicles," said Jing.

Jaguar Land Rover's high-gear adaptability paying dividends

By LI FUSHENG

Tim Howard, chief financial officer of Jaguar Land Rover China, poses with the carmaker's iconic Defender. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

> We will maintain our DNA while still delivering satisfying surprises in our new products."
>
> **Tim Howard,** chief financial officer of Jaguar Land Rover China

British premium automaker Jaguar Land Rover is generating better-than-expected financial performance while seamlessly forging a long-term strategy for the e-mobility era.

Statistics show the company's revenues for the financial year 2023 (April 2022 to March 2023) soared 25 percent year-on-year to 22.8 billion pounds ($28.2 billion) and its free cash flow for the financial year was 521 million pounds, with a positive operating margin (earning before interest and taxes) of 2.4 percent compared to negative cash flow and EBIT in the financial year 2022.

Jaguar Land Rover's performance in the fourth quarter was extraordinary, with wholesales reaching 94,649 units — up 19 percent compared to the previous quarter (ending Dec 31 2022) and 24 percent compared to the same quarter a year ago.

"When China is winning, the globe is winning," emphasized Tim Howard, chief financial officer of Jaguar Land Rover China.

China is one of Jaguar Land Rover's most important markets, and fourth quarter deliveries in the country soared by 17 percent year-on-year.

Howard said China has a "significant" role to play in the company's global business, adding that its profit in the Chinese market for the financial year 2023 was double the figure of five years ago. "We are back in the game," he added.

Jaguar Land Rover is optimistic about its global business performance, with about 200,000 orders on schedule to be delivered by the end of this quarter. Of that total, 76 percent are for Range Rover, Range Rover Sport and Defender, a clear sign of clients' enthusiasm with the automaker's iconic heritage and models.

The company said it is targeting increased wholesales through the year in order to achieve EBIT margins of over 6 percent in the financial year 2024 despite lingering supply challenges and macro risks. Investment spending is expected to increase to about 3 billion pounds in the fiscal year while free cash flow is expected to be over 2 billion pounds.

Howard said Jaguar Land Rover is ramping up its pace to stay uniquely competitive in China, the world's largest and fastest-changing market.

"We have to stay ahead of changes in China. What was a dream three years ago is already reality today," he said, referring to the growing popularity of electric vehicles in the country and all the state-of-the-art technologies, including autonomous driving.

Jaguar Land Rover has its own roadmap, which will reposition the company as an electric-first modern luxury automaker by 2030, when all nameplates will offer BEV variants.

Howard said the Range Rover BEV will be launched in 2024 and the first of three reimagined modern luxury Jaguars will be an electric four-door GT to be unveiled in 2024. With more power output than any previous Jaguar, its range is up to 700 kilometers.

Jaguar Land Rover has been expanding its team of engineers in China to work on applications that meet the increasingly demanding requirements of tech-savvy premium car customers.

According to Howard, the company's China contingent is working closely with local technology companies, including chipmaker EcarX, charging network operator StarCharge and Alibaba Cloud on topics like cloud computing.

He said what the team is accomplishing is of global significance for the company because new developments in the Chinese market can later become trends in other markets.

While electrification is blurring the features of many brands, Howard said Jaguar Land Rover would remain true to its heritage and stand out as it has in the age of gasoline vehicles.

"We will never lose history. History is there," said Howard, "Our DNA can be seen in our forthcoming models." He said a new uniqueness is essential for the company's success in this age of mobility that features electrification.

"We will maintain our DNA while still delivering satisfying surprises in our new products," Howard added, citing the example that 76 percent of the current 200,000 orders on its books are for Range Rover, Range Rover Sport and Defender models. That is testament to the automaker's "House of Brands" approach, which aims to amplify the unique character of each of its offerings: Range Rover, Defender, Discovery and Jaguar.

Howard, who had planned to stay no more than two years when he left the United Kingdom for Shanghai, has now lived in China for seven years. He said he is excited about the market.

"I now see China as my home; this is where it is happening," said Howard, whose Chinese name is Han Shaoshuai, which literally means "promising marshal".

Born and raised in the UK, he prefers to dress in the traditional British style but has added some fashionable Shanghai brands to his wardrobe.

Howard's enthusiasm for the country encompasses much more than elements of oriental aesthetics. He is deeply involved in corporate responsibility projects, including those that Jaguar Land Rover has activated in China's less developed regions. At a primary school that the company helped build in Yunnan province, he has volunteered to teach English.

"I was fortunate to go there twice, and the energy and hope in the eyes of the students was incredible," he said.

Jaguar Land Rover's bond with students in the Yunnan school is so strong that some of their photos are on display at the company's office in Shanghai.

"Walking past photos of the Hope School students and their families every day continues to remind me what is important to us as a company and how we need to always support society as a whole," said Howard. "I will never sacrifice any budget or investment in corporate social responsibility activities here. CSR is always our top priority."

LIFE

Culture down to a tea

Domestic and international events showcase the intricate and compelling process in brewing and enjoying an exquisite taste of history, **Cheng Yuezhu** reports.

Accompanied by the resonant sound of traditional Chinese instruments and the chirping of birds, guests strolled into a garden nestled within the Prince Kung's Palace Museum, where tea experts from around China invited them to take a seat and relish a cup of tea.

The Beijing event, held on May 15, marked the beginning of the Tea for Harmony: Yaji Cultural Salon, hosted by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, to celebrate China's tea culture.

Yaji, which translates to "elegant gathering", harks back to an ancient type of social event, where scholars and literati gathered to indulge in a variety of refined cultural activities such as tea tasting, *guqin* (traditional Chinese zither) playing and poetry composition and recital.

Part of the lifestyle of traditional Chinese literati, contemporary *yaji* offers a gateway for people from home and abroad to journey back in time and immerse themselves in the leisured world of scholar-officials.

A total of 75 diplomats and representatives from 41 countries and international organizations attended the event, accompanied by experts and officials from a breadth of Chinese cultural institutions, trade unions and companies.

"Tea culture has played a key role in the social development of many civilizations along the Silk Road, promoting exchanges between people and fostering mutual learning," says Shahbaz Khan, director and representative of the UNESCO Multisectoral Regional Office for East Asia, in a speech at the event.

At the salon, which delved into tea culture, a symbol of harmony, equilibrium and pursuit of inner peace, he said that he hopes to gain a deeper understanding of the value of tea, not only as a delightful beverage, but also as an embodiment of cultural heritage, identity and continuity.

Among the tea stalls at the event, that of Zhang Zhifeng, from East China's Fujian province, received considerable attention. His wares seemed closer to art than a common drink.

Guests were invited to join him and try their hand at the tea art known as *chabaixi*. By whisking powdered tea together with water in small quantities, a layer of foam emerges on the surface of the liquid. On this natural canvas, one can gently run a bamboo teaspoon across the surface, writing Chinese characters or painting delicate flowers, birds or landscapes, turning a cup of tea into a tasteful work of art.

For nearly 40 years, Zhang has been devoted to the preservation of this technique, the earliest mention of which is in the records of the Tang Dynasty (618-907). The art reached its prime in the Song Dynasty (960-1279).

He was first drawn to *chabaixi* while at university, where he majored in tea science. His introduction to the art was accidental — he stumbled upon mention of it in an ancient record. Learning that the technique was on the verge of dying out, he started researching it, and dedicated himself to restoring it.

This proved challenging, as records about *chabaixi* were fragmented and scattered across many different ancient poems, chronicles and paintings. He had collected several thousand relevant records by the time he made his first attempt to re-create the technique, in 2008.

Zhang says that *chabaixi* holds rich historical, artistic, scientific and social significance. It not only serves as a reference for ancient people's aesthetic tastes, tea-making techniques and other ways of life, but also embodies the ancient Chinese values of purity, reverence, harmony and beauty.

In the past, he has met visitors who mistook the technique for latte art, but they are not the same. This ancient technique uses clear water to create the patterns, without in any way changing the tea's essence.

"This event carries particular significance. Our focus in the past was primarily on promoting tea culture domestically, but this event is targeted worldwide," Zhang says. "It offers an authentic portrayal of Chinese culture, in all its vastness and depth."

On this year's International Tea Day, an annual celebration falling on May 21, the ministry brought together organizations from 16 provincial-level administrative regions, 19 Chinese embassies and consulates, 38 China cultural centers and five tourism offices to put on the salon in 41 countries, as well as at the headquarters of the United Nations and UNESCO.

Exhibitions, screenings, performances and demonstrations were organized, allowing visitors to gain a fuller understanding of Chinese tea culture.

Apart from the Yaji Cultural Salon, the ministry has launched another event series, titled Sharing Intangible Cultural Heritage, centered on the promotion of national preservation projects related to tea culture.

From May 19 to 22, the gathering was held in Fuzhou, capital of Fujian, co-hosted by the ministry and the provincial government.

In 2022, traditional tea processing techniques and their associated social practices in China were added to UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

The event series was first launched in December in celebration of the additions to the UNESCO list. Fifteen provinces, autonomous regions and municipalities that had contributed to the drive unveiled demonstrations to highlight important aspects of tea culture.

"This year, we further enriched the content, innovated the format, and expanded the scale of the activities," said Li Xiaosong, deputy director-general of the department of intangible cultural heritage at the ministry, at a news conference on May 16.

According to Li, more than 130 tea-related intangible cultural heritage events were organized, constituting a comprehensive display of recent achievements in the preservation and promotion of tea culture.

Li pointed to the grassroots origins of many of the cultural features on display.

"People are the owners, inheritors and beneficiaries of intangible cultural heritage. The protection of intangible cultural heritage always puts the people at the center and aims to benefit the people with its achievements," he says.

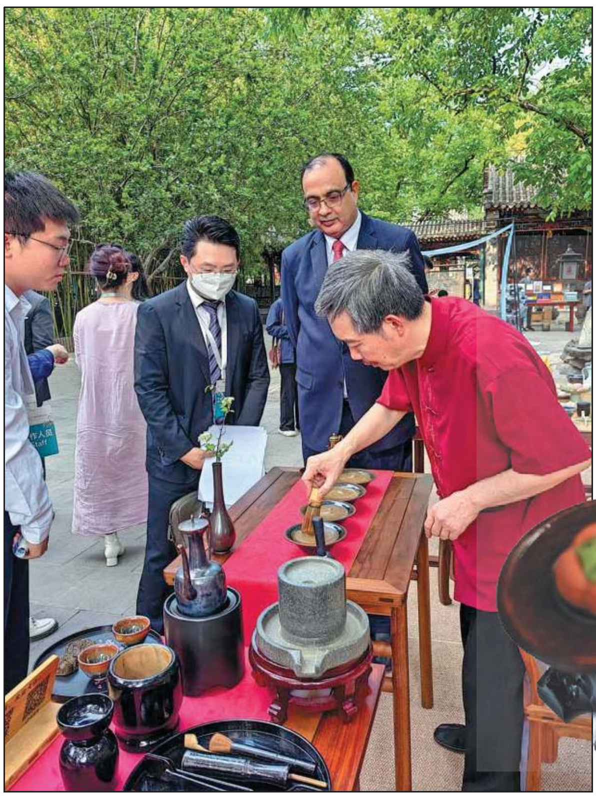
To integrate intangible cultural heritage into contemporary life, the main venue in Fuzhou hosted a wide array of activities suited to tea enthusiasts from all walks of life.

Inheritors of traditional tea culture showcased their skills. Tea-related workshops and companies displayed their products. Teenagers went on field trips to learn about the history of tea and its production, and experts shared their visions at forum discussions.

Each of the 15 regions made contributions that exemplified their unique local characteristics, putting on demonstrations of their distinctive tea-making or tea-tasting customs.

Other provinces across China also hosted training sessions, lectures, exhibitions and fairs to popularize tea culture among the general public, and teenagers in particular, to celebrate this year's International Tea Day.

Contact the writer at chengyuezhu@chinadaily.com.cn



Top left: Shahbaz Khan, from the UNESCO Multisectoral Regional Office for East Asia, learns *chabaixi*. **Top right:** The launch ceremony of Tea for Harmony: Yaji Cultural Salon at the Prince Kung's Palace Museum in Beijing on May 15. YANG XIAOYU / CHINA DAILY **Left:** Inheritor of the *chabaixi* technique Zhang Zhifeng, from Fujian province, shows his expertise at the ceremony. **Above:** Dessert served at the event. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

What's on

The spiritual domain

Ancient Chinese Calligraphy and Painting, one of the long-term exhibitions at the National Museum of China, frequently rotates its diverse collection and features selections from an assembly of some 10,000 classic Chinese paintings and calligraphic pieces. It is currently displaying dozens of landscape paintings produced between the 15th and 19th centuries under the theme "Traveling Through Mountains and Waters". The mountain-and-water genre is one of the three main categories of classic Chinese painting. Painters depict not only the physical world before their eyes but also contemplate the relations between fullness and emptiness. The works on show reflect a high point in literati painting in the Ming (1368-1644) and Qing (1644-1911) dynasties. This particular style distinguished paintings by intellectuals, especially those serving as imperial officials, from those by court artists and commercial painters. Literati painting normally combined a sought-after dialogue with the universe with a half-realistic, half-imagined approach to depict nature. Those on show include the famous *Album of Eight Views of Beijing* by Ming artist Wang Fu. The exhibition unveils to the audience the spiritual, aesthetic and philosophical world of the literati artists of past centuries.
9 am-5 pm, closed on Mondays. 16 Chang'an Avenue, Dongcheng district, Beijing. 010-6511-6400.

Graduation show

Having been through years of challenges, undergraduate students at the Central Academy of Fine Arts in Beijing are welcoming one of the most important moments in their

school careers, the exhibition of graduation works, now being held at CAFA's art museum. The exhibition, which runs until June 20, exhibits works of various kinds filling several floors, overflowing into some of the school buildings. The exhibition presents these graduating students' explorations with art, as well as their participation in projects addressing social needs, such as the uplifting of urban spaces, rural vitalization and public art education. Tours have been organized for members of cultural institutions, creativity enterprises and other employers to provide more exposure for the students.
9:30 am-5:30 pm. 8 Huajiadi South Street, Chaoyang district, Beijing. 010-6477-1575.

Painterly tales

Peng Wei is known for her works attempting to bring the tradition of ink-and-water paintings into the narratives of modern life. She works with canvas, installations and digital media to showcase not only her refined brushwork but also her explorations to enrich the ink art tradition, by telling the stories and communicating the complex emotions of modern people. Her current exhibition, *A Room With a Story*, running at Nanchizi Art Museum through to July 5, takes viewers to the past while keeping them grounded in the present, blending dreams, memory and reality, examining concepts of truth and falsehood. Some of the

works on show are suspended in midair. The layout of the exhibition hall resembles a corridor to present a mysterious atmosphere. The design is intended to recollect the murals in millennium-old caves of Dunhuang, Northwest China's Gansu province, as well as the Renaissance frescoes of Italy, in which she saw endless stories of the cycles of life and found inspiration for her work.
10 am-1 pm, 2-5 pm, closed on Mondays. 21 Pudu Temple West Alleyway, Dongcheng district, Beijing. 010-6528-1891.

CHINA DAILY

LIFE

A page out of history

Thanks to the efforts of craftsman Wang Xingwu, an ancient village is enjoying the fruits of a traditional papermaking boom, **Yang Feiyue** reports.

Wang Xingwu has an occasional, but long developed habit of collecting wildflowers and grass from the mountains.

He turns them into a special handmade material, which is known as *huacao* (flower and grass) paper and is mostly decorative, used for wallpaper, lanterns, umbrellas and bookmarks.

It has become a hit among visitors who beat a path to Shiqiao village in the north of Danzhai county, Southwest China's Guizhou province.

They are drawn to the village's profound papermaking history, which stretches back more than 1,000 years, and are eager to try their hand at the craft, which is considered one of the four great inventions of ancient China, on a par with printing, gunpowder and the compass.

It has been years since Wang, who is in his 50s, developed his novel paper stock, with the aim of catering to visitors and promoting the local papermaking tradition.

"I was once making paper in a cave, and then a leaf wafted onto it and got stuck," he recalls.

"Then, it hit me. The paper could be a piece of art if I integrated grass and flowers."

Through trial and error, Wang managed to perfect his method and his novel product has found an appeal among the younger generation.

Wang will walk visitors through the papermaking process.

Compared with conventional paper, making flower and grass paper is more complex.

"When picking flowers, you need to be careful and keep them intact," he says.

The first step in making *huacao* paper is to flatten flowers and leaves and place them on top of the pulp, Wang says.

"Once they are flattened, we use them to create the design before we add another layer of pulp," he says, adding that, this way, the color of the plants will also be retained.

Then, it will be left to air-dry for a while, before heat is applied to temper the paper.

"The final work reflects a noticeable concavo-convex texture, with an inconsistent, tactile feel. When used as the exterior cover of a notebook, for example, it looks particularly beautiful," Wang says.

Many locals have since taken advantage of Wang's ingenious idea, and use visitors' curiosity in the paper to earn extra income.

Shiqiao lies below a towering bridge upon which countless cars race by every day.

Yet, time seems to slow down in the village, as many locals, who are mostly ethnic Miao, take their time to meticulously turn tree bark into handmade sheets of white paper, using old-fashioned methods and unpolluted spring water from the nearby mountains.

This traditional technique was listed as a national intangible cultural heritage in 2006.

The process of making a single sheet of Shiqiao paper involves more than 10 steps, including soaking, pulping, boiling, rinsing, pounding and drying, Wang says.

"To be more specific, after the bark is peeled off, it is soaked in water for 24 hours, before it is steamed with lime," he explains.

"You can see if the fibers are of good quality, and we use these fibers to make paper."

The fibers will then be soaked, cooked, and beaten into pulp. They are then placed in wooden molds for shaping. After being dried and tempered, a sheet of paper is completed.

The entire process is done manually using natural materials, and the paper has renowned characteristics, such as its flexibility, gloss and strong water absorbency, Wang says.

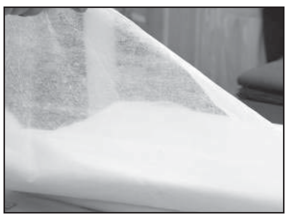
Experts have found that Shiqiao's papermaking process is basically in line with the interpretation from *Tiangong Kaiwu*, an encyclopedia that covers a wide variety of technical subjects, compiled by Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) scientist Song Yingxing. They have confirmed that the village's papermaking industry came into existence during the Tang (618-907) Dynasty.

Wang's paper mill is one of the oldest in the village, and his family has been engaged in papermaking for 19 generations.

He began systematically learning traditional papermaking skills from his elder family members in 1981, right after he graduated from high school, when almost every family in the neighborhood worked in the industry.

The local papermaking tradition has been well-preserved, spanning numerous dynasties over the course of a millennium, and it is regarded as a "living fossil". Its longevity is attributed to its use of the bark of a local plant, which grows in the nearby mountains.

"The fibers of this plant are uniformly fine and consistent, making it suitable for producing high-quality paper," Wang explains.



Clockwise from top: Wang Xingwu (second from right) and villagers tie up and soak the bark of a local plant, the unique basis of their paper products, beside a river in Shiqiao village, Guizhou province; Wang teaches locals how to select and peel bark to make paper; handheld fans made with *huacao* paper; a special thin paper for restoring ancient books; Wang prepares to dry the *huacao* paper; torn bark is soaked in a special liquid for treatment.
PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

> "To adapt to today's society, ancient crafts must embrace modern influences. This way, more people can appreciate traditional handicrafts."
>
> **Wang Xingwu,** traditional papermaking craftsman

However, since the 1990s, use of machine-made paper started to significantly affect the traditional business, and many families were forced to look elsewhere to make a living.

Wang was no exception.

"At that time, people preferred industrial paper because it was cheaper and more readily available in larger quantities," he recalls.

Consequently, Wang shifted his focus to the production of fuses for firecrackers. It was through these fuses that Wang's paper mill scraped by.

Unfortunately, Wang's business was set to receive another body blow. After a ban on privately made firecrackers was implemented in the late 1990s, Wang found himself in an unprecedented state of uncertainty.

However, his luck turned in 1998. A Hong Kong client was looking for a specific type of dyed paper, and he managed to establish contact with Wang.

Wang grabbed the opportunity with both hands, eventually delivering the required paper much to the delight of his client. The new business helped him get back on his feet and injected in him a renewed faith in the industry that has been the lifeblood of generations of his family.

In 2000, Wang made the decision to explore new production methods. He wanted to try producing colored paper to expand the market. Moreover, he hoped to transform the colored, handmade paper into souvenirs to attract more tourists.

This approach has not only allowed him to increase his sales and bring more benefits to the local community, but also raised awareness among visitors about the charm of local handmade paper.

In 2004, the government rediscovered the importance of the village and its papermaking tradition, and started to direct more attention and support to the development of its distinctive paper culture, which, in turn, helped fuel Wang's cause.

As his business grew, Wang's paper gained popularity among domestic and international tourists, and has been sold both at home and abroad.

Such experiences woke him up to the importance of innovation in traditional craftsmanship.

"To adapt to today's society, ancient crafts must embrace modern influences. This way, more people can appreciate traditional handicrafts," he says.

One of his proudest innovations is the Yingchun paper, which, he claims, scientists estimate could last for more than 1,500 years.

Now, many facilities, such as the National Library of China and National Museum of China, are ordering this paper for the restoration of ancient books and paintings, as the village is now one of the very few places in the world that can produce paper of this nature.

Speaking about its "recipe", Wang says it's very dependent on location, water quality and temperature, the delicate requirements of which just happen to match Shiqiao's unique conditions.

More locals have reconnected with their family traditions and have joined the village's papermaking army.

One such papermaker, Yang Jinzhu, takes pride in his ability to produce 500 sheets of paper a day.

"It might take three to 10 years to grasp the craft, but it's worth it, since we are making paper from the ancient times," Yang says, adding that he enjoys the increasing admiration from the public toward his hometown's specialty.

Under Wang's leadership, a papermaking cooperative has been founded.

It has forged cooperation agreements with more than 60 travel agencies and institutes of higher learning, and tens of thousands of travelers have made their way to Shiqiao to experience the craft firsthand.

Since 2020, the cooperative has arranged training for local villagers and visitors to learn about the papermaking tradition.

As more local people are capable of making the paper, they have been able to take an increasing number of orders.

More paper products have also been developed, such as lanterns, fans, bookmarks, handbags and umbrellas.

Last year, the cooperative brought in a total income of 6.5 million yuan ($921,000).

It has been selected as one of 66 exemplary intangible cultural heritage workshops supporting rural vitalization by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security, and the National Rural Revitalization Administration.

The booming papermaking has seen Wang take on several excellent apprentices.

"They have all committed a lot of time and energy to studying the ancient handmade paper craft," he says.

"I believe they will continuously roll out innovations and help bring the craft to more people's attention."

Wang says he is planning to help increase the village's papermaking facilities and raise product quality, as well as trying to find more applications for the traditional craft in art, design and home decoration.

Contact the writer at yangfeiyue@chinadaily.com.cn

SPORTS

SOCCER

Bayern boardroom upheaval clouds title joy

German giant in chaos as chief executive Kahn sent packing despite final-day Bundesliga drama

Bayern Munich goalkeeper Manuel Neuer hoists the Bundesliga trophy as his teammates celebrate following Saturday's 2-1 victory at Cologne. Borussia Dortmund's 2-2 draw with Mainz meant Bayern retained the title on goal difference. REUTERS

Joao Cancelo (22) and Serge Gnabry embrace after Bayern's dramatic final-day title triumph, which sparked wild scenes of celebration among the traveling supporters at Cologne on Saturday. REUTERS

DORTMUND, Germany — Despite a record 11th straight Bundesliga title win, Bayern Munich's immediate future has been thrown into serious doubt after the shock sackings of CEO Oliver Kahn and sporting director Hasan Salihamidzic.

Manager Thomas Tuchel revealed the decision had been premeditated, regardless of the result of Saturday's matches.

"I've known since yesterday" Tuchel said, saying "the two of them were responsible for the journey we've been on together.

"I'm trying to process it now."

The drama continued after the sacking, with Kahn taking to Twitter and complaining he had been banned from the club's title celebration.

Kahn congratulated the team on its win, but said: "I would love to celebrate with you, but unfortunately I can't because the club has prohibited me from doing so."

'Feel the pressure'

Before the match, Dortmund looked set for a memorable championship win, having closed the gap to Bayern from nine points at Christmas to take a two-point lead into the final round.

A veteran of now 12 Bundesliga titles, Bayern captain Thomas Mueller piled on the pressure on Friday, unleashing mind games via social media, saying he knew Dortmund's players would be nervous.

"I think 200,000 to 400,000 fans will be expected at the championship celebration," Mueller wrote, adding: "If Dortmund wants to win, you have to stand up to (the pressure) as a player."

"I believe that the players will also feel this pressure and that's where my hope lies."

The side was 2-0 down after 25 minutes, with striker Sebastien Haller having missed a penalty.

While Dortmund fought back to draw 2-2, the point was not enough as Bayern won the title — its 33rd Bundesliga crown — on goal difference.

Bayern and Dortmund finished the season on 71 points, the lowest points total for a champion in Germany in more than a decade.

Muted celebrations

While much of the post-match focus was aimed squarely at Dortmund's inability to take advantage of a golden opportunity, Tuchel suggested the upcoming celebrations would be muted.

"Instead of celebrating, we now have another issue" the manager said in response to the sackings.

German soccer clubs give a greater degree of control to club officials than clubs in England and elsewhere, with Kahn and Salihamidzic seen as directly responsible for most aspects of management in recent seasons, including recruitment. They were behind the decision to sack coach Julian Nagelsmann and hire Tuchel in March, despite the manager having lost just three of 37 games in all competitions this season.

The two also signed off on the exit of record-breaking forward Robert Lewandowski to Barcelona.

Bayern still clearly misses the goals of Lewandowski, with none of the side's star-studded forward line stepping into the void.

The Pole scored 344 goals in 375 games for Bayern, winning the league in each of his eight seasons in Bavaria.

Lewandowski left Bayern frustrated at the public courting of then Dortmund forward Erling Haaland by Salihamidzic, later saying he felt disrespected after his service to the club.

Haaland eventually went to Manchester City and Bayern brought in Sadio Mane from Liverpool.

Mane, now 31, scored just seven league goals in 25 league games as he struggled with injury and form.

Bayern's best forward is the 20-year-old Jamal Musiala, with others like Serge Gnabry, Leroy Sane, Kingsley Coman and Mane failing to deliver consistently.

Money is also a major issue at Bayern, despite the club's domestic dominance in Germany.

Although Bayern may not splash the transfer cash to the same degree as its English and Spanish counterparts, the side's wage bill is reportedly higher than Manchester City, with several older players on long-term deals.

The average age of Bayern's squad is 26.5, one of the oldest in the Bundesliga and much higher than rivals Dortmund and RB Leipzig.

Mueller and injured goalkeeper Manuel Neuer are well over 30 and Tuchel failed to get the team to play in a consistent or fluid fashion.

While Bayern's domestic supremacy is assured, internal uncertainty and the rise of state-funded super clubs, such as City and Paris Saint-Germain, mean the German champion faces a cloudy future.

AFP

Devastated Dortmund digests 'brutal' ending

A tearful Borussia Dortmund manager Edin Terzic said there would be "no happy ending" after his side stumbled with the title in sight, giving Bayern Munich an 11th straight Bundesliga crown.

Dortmund held a two-point lead atop the table before the final round but was held 2-2 at home by Mainz, allowing Bayern, who won 2-1 at Cologne, to jump up to first place, winning the title on goal difference.

Terzic was seen in front of the club's famous "Yellow Wall" after the final whistle in tears, as the fans chanted the Dortmund-born coach's name.

"You can see how hard and how tough this sport that we fell in love with can be," said Terzic, adding: "It hurts extremely — there will be no happy ending for us this year."

Dortmund, whose star midfielder Jude Bellingham was an unused substitute against Mainz due to a knee problem, won the unlikely support of Thomas Mueller. The Bayern captain took time out from celebrating his side's 11th straight title — and his 12th Bundesliga championship — to express sympathy for Dortmund.

"I'm not apologizing for becoming champion and we're happy about that, but when you think of the others, then I feel a bit sorry," he said. "Even if they don't want or need to hear it. I'm not trying to present myself as bighearted or anything, but it's tough."

Captain Mats Hummels, the only member of the squad to have tasted championship glory with Dortmund, said "the next days will be brutal".

"It's going to be difficult to digest. It will take more than a few days," he added.

Dortmund midfielder Emre Can said simply: "We gave everything as a team but it wasn't to be.

"We wanted it but in the end we didn't make it."

Dortmund led the table four times this season, but each time dropped points and allowed Bayern to return to the summit.

— AFP

Summer recruitment key as PSG plans for life without Messi

PARIS — Now that Paris Saint-Germain has completed the job of retaining the Ligue 1 title, the club can focus on the latest rebuilding job in the French capital, where sweeping changes are needed to the faltering Qatari project.

PSG's 11th domestic league triumph — its ninth in the last 11 years — was secured despite Christophe Galtier's team losing six games in 2023 while nearest challenger Lens has taken most of the plaudits.

"It has not been our best season but it has still been a good one," insisted captain Marquinhos recently.

It has been largely forgotten now, given its latest elimination in the Champions League last 16 at the hands of Bayern Munich, but PSG was superb at the start of the campaign.

It was unbeaten before the World Cup, when Kylian Mbappe, Lionel Messi and Neymar appeared driven by the prospect of the approaching tournament in Qatar.

Yet the unraveling that followed was dramatic, with Neymar again cut down by injury and Messi suspended for missing training after taking an unauthorized trip to Saudi Arabia.

The mood around the club in recent weeks has appeared sullen, with fans disaffected.

"When we take stock, we need to analyze the first half of the season and what state the players were in when they came back from the World Cup," Galtier said on Friday.

"But I understand the disappointment. It has been a very strange season."

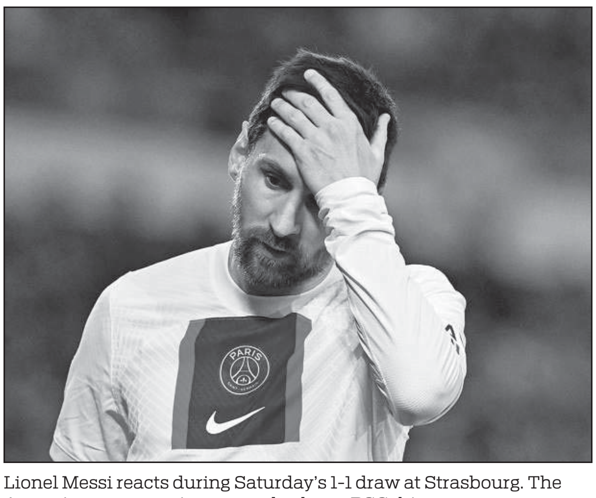
All about Mbappe

The coaching job has at times seemed too big for Galtier, who arrived last year in the wake of Mbappe's decision to snub Real Madrid and sign a new three-year contract.

Mbappe — the scorer of 40 goals this season — might wonder now if he made the right choice, although the question of his future is bound to come up again soon.

According to reports, the 24-year-old's contract will run out next year unless he exercises an option to stay until 2025.

However, PSG must now seek to rebuild with Mbappe the focal point more than ever.



Lionel Messi reacts during Saturday's 1-1 draw at Strasbourg. The Argentine superstar is expected to leave PSG this summer. AFP

The aging and out-of-contract Messi is expected to depart and the physically frail Neymar, now 31, is a fading force.

All eyes will be on what Luis Campos, PSG's Portuguese recruitment guru, does in the transfer market.

He is restrained by UEFA's Financial Fair Play rules and by the fact that PSG has an array of unwanted players on big contracts who are set to return after a season on loan.

The saving on Messi's annual salary of an estimated 30 million euros ($32.5m) net would provide some leeway.

Much has been made of the willingness to focus on younger players hailing from the Paris region, a prolific breeding ground for talent.

This, after all, is a club which has been stung by the decision to let so many prospects leave in recent years, from Kingsley Coman and Adrien Rabiot to Moussa Diaby, Christopher Nkunku and Mike Maignan.

Galtier set to go

The holy grail is the Champions League, in which PSG has gone out in the last 16 five times in seven seasons, regularly coming up short at the crucial moment.

"Lots of teams want to go all the way but only one can do so," said Galtier.

"To win the Champions League, or to give yourself a chance, you need to be on form in February and March and we were not."

PSG has been here before, and Nasser al-Khelaifi, club president since the Qatari takeover in 2011, surely cannot afford to get another rebuild wrong.

Qatari interest in buying Manchester United, via Sheikh Jassim bin Hamad Al Thani, has led to questions about the potential impact on PSG.

Meanwhile, the club's owners continue to be thwarted in their attempts to buy Parc des Princes from the city of Paris so they can expand capacity, raising the possibility of a move to the larger Stade de France.

All of which means some uncertainty about what lies ahead, although Galtier at least knows his future is likely elsewhere.

Under investigation over allegations that he made racist and discriminatory remarks to players when in charge at Nice last season, which he denies, Galtier's authority has diminished over the campaign.

A new coach capable of commanding the dressing room's respect is required, and Jose Mourinho and Luis Enrique have been linked with the job.

With PSG having gone backwards in two years with Messi, it remains to be seen if the latest rebuild succeeds where past attempts have all failed.

AFP

SPORTS

TENNIS

Trailblazers eye more breakthroughs

China's in-form trio bidding to continue recent clay-court surge at French Open

From left: China's Zhang Zhizhen, Shang Juncheng and Wu Yibing have enjoyed encouraging results on clay this season and hope to maintain that form at the French Open, which started on Sunday. AGENCIES

By SUN XIAOCHEN
sunxiaochen@chinadaily.com.cn

With three Chinese men featuring in the main draw for the first time at the French Open, hopes are high that China can continue to add to its milestones on clay after a season of many breakthroughs.

Traditionally developing talents on hard courts, China's men are turning things around on their least-favorite surface, with a surging trio of world No 54 Wu Yibing, 71st-ranked Zhang Zhizhen and teenage star Shang Juncheng primed to make their presence felt in the main draw in Paris.

As the youngest and lowest ranked of the three, 18-year-old Shang racked up three solid qualifying wins last week to join Wu and Zhang, who both qualified via the rankings, in the main draw in Paris, to form a strong Chinese contingent at Roland Garros.

It is the second time the three Chinese men are appearing in a main draw after they did so at the Australian Open in January.

"We are proud to do it again here after we did it together already in Melbourne. It's a great learning process for each of us and fuels us with a boost of positive energy," Shang said of the collective effort during an online interview with Chinese media on Saturday.

"I think I've grown more comfortable playing on clay after surviving the qualifiers. The key is to stay aggressive yet keep patient, and to play at a fast pace to contain the opponent's top spins in long rallies," said Shang, who secured his maiden French Open main-draw appearance after beating Argentine Renzo Olivo, 2-1, in the final qualifying round on Thursday.

Shang, who opens against clay specialist Juan Pablo Varillas of Peru on Monday, is endeavoring to keep his expectations in check.

"The South Americans are more comfortable on clay than us, so I need to take one point at a time, hopefully play my best tennis and force errors from him," said the world No 200.

> "Right now, it's the three of us, but perhaps in the future, we might have four or even five. I hope to see more Chinese players participating in the main draw."
>
> **Zhang Zhizhen,** world No 71

As China's top-ranked man, Wu is facing the toughest first-round opponent among the three in Spanish veteran Roberto Bautista Agut, a former world No 9 and the 2019 Wimbledon semifinalist.

Wu's recent momentum on clay, though, has raised hopes for yet another giant-killing performance by the 23-year-old Zhejiang native, who beat current world No 8 Taylor Fritz and the big-serving former world No 8 John Isner, both of the US, to win his maiden ATP Tour singles title in Dallas, Texas in February. That was also China's first title triumph on the circuit.

Wu continues to show rapid improvement on the physically demanding clay courts, highlighted by his quarterfinal run at an ATP 250 tourney last week in Geneva, where he overcame 2018 French Open semifinalist Marco Cecchinato of Italy in straights sets in the second round.

However, Wu starts his Roland Garros campaign nursing a left-leg muscle strain which forced him to retire while 4-1 down in the first set of his quarterfinal against Germany's Alexander Zverev.

Should Wu and Shang both survive their opening tests in Paris, they will meet in a Chinese "derby" in the second round, which is expected to trigger a huge interest in China.

Zhang, as the oldest of the trio, reckons China's rise in men's tennis has only just begun.

"Right now, it's the three of us, but perhaps in the future, we might have four or even five. I hope to see more Chinese players participating in the main draw," said Zhang, who opens his campaign against 53rd-ranked Dusan Lajovic.

Serbia's Lajovic won his second ATP title in Bosnia and Herzegovina last month, stunning 22-time major winner Novak Djokovic in the third round at the ATP 250 event.

Zhang's appearance in Paris makes him the first Chinese mainland player to have entered the main draw at all four majors – after fighting through qualifying rounds at Wimbledon in 2021, last year's US Open and this year's Australian Open.

He's never won a match on this stage, though, dropping his three previous openers, all in five sets.

"I expect something better will happen this time," said Zhang, a 26-year-old Shanghai native. "Otherwise, I will have to accept a fourth defeat in a row."

Like Wu, Zhang is enjoying an upswing on clay of late, upsetting three top-30 players in Canada's Denis Shapovalov, Cameron Norrie of Britain and Fritz to reach the quarterfinals of last month's Madrid Open. That is the furthest stage a Chinese player has reached at an ATP Masters 1000 event.

"My performances throughout the clay season have definitely boosted my confidence. But against such a tough opponent I need to play my best, make all the necessary preparations, and not be complacent," he said.

Despite the progress of the men, the Chinese women boast a stronger representation in Paris, with five players, led by 19th seed Zheng Qinwen, making into the main draw at a tournament won by China's Li Na in 2011.

BASKETBALL

White lightning gives Celtics shot at history

MIAMI, Florida — The Boston Celtics were a 10th of a second away from elimination. The Miami Heat were a 10th of a second from the NBA Finals.

Derrick White owned that final moment. White scored on a putback as time expired and the Boston Celtics moved to the brink of the greatest comeback in NBA playoffs history, holding off the Miami Heat 104-103 on Saturday night to force a Game 7 in the Eastern Conference finals.

"Derrick White, like a flash of lightning, just came out of nowhere and saved the day, man," Boston's Jaylen Brown said. "An incredible play."

White knew it was good. Referees reviewed it, but it didn't take long to give the official word.

Elation for Boston. Devastation for Miami.

"Ball came to me," White said. "I made the shot."

Perhaps Boston will call it The Shot.

White became the second player in NBA history to hit a buzzer-beater with his team trailing and facing elimination — Michael Jordan's "The Shot" for Chicago against Cleveland in 1989 being the other.

"I was just happy," White said. "Season was on the line. We don't want to go home."

Jayson Tatum scored 31 points, Brown scored 26 and Marcus Smart added 21 for the Celtics, who became only the fourth NBA team to erase a 3-0 deficit in a best-of-seven series and force a deciding game. The others in that club — the 1951 New York Knicks in the NBA Finals, the 1994 Denver Nuggets in the second round and the 2003 Portland Trail Blazers in the first round — all lost Game 7, all on the road.

Boston, however, is going home for its shot at history. Game 7 is Monday night on the Celtics' floor, a matchup that will decide who meets the Western Conference champion Denver Nuggets in a title series that will start on Thursday.

"It's a seven-game series," Heat coach Erik Spoelstra said. "There's nothing better than Game 7s."

Jimmy Butler made three free throws with 3.0 seconds left — the foul was originally called with 2.1 seconds left; referees put 0.9 seconds back on after reviewing the play to see if it was a 3-point try that Al Horford fouled him on — for a one-point Heat lead. It capped a Miami rally from 10 points down with less than 4 minutes remaining.

The Celtics had White inbound the ball on the game's final possession, and he passed to Smart — who missed a 3-pointer. But White sprinted from the inbound spot to the rim, the ball fell into his hands and he got the lay-in away just before time ran out to extend Boston's season.

There had been other buzzer-beaters from players whose teams were facing an elimination game, but before Saturday, only Jordan's came with his team trailing.

Celtics coach Joe Mazzulla was asked what went through his mind at that moment.

"Nothing," Mazzulla said. "Game 7."

Butler scored 24 points and Caleb Martin had 21 for the Heat, who are trying to pull off their own improbable trek to the title series by being only the second No 8 seed to make the NBA Finals. They've now lost as many games this week — three — as they had in their first 14 playoff games this spring combined on the way to ousting No 1 Milwaukee, then No 5 New York and taking what was supposed to be an insurmountable 3-0 lead over the second-seeded Celtics.

Jayson Tatum blocks a Jimmy Butler shot during Game 6 of the NBA Eastern Conference finals in Miami on Saturday. The Boston Celtics beat the Miami Heat 104-103 to tie the series. USA TODAY SPORTS

"We've got to go on the road and do something special," Butler said. "But we've got a special group."

The Celtics have now won five of their last six East finals games in Miami — a stretch that includes a Game 7 over the Heat last season to reach the NBA Finals.

That one, obviously, ended the Heat season. At least this time, Miami still has a chance.

"I don't know how we're going to get this done, but we're going to go out there and get it done," Spoelstra said. "And that's what the next 48 hours is about. There's been nothing easy about this season for our group, and so we just have to do it the hard way."

The Heat are the 151st team to grab a 3-0 series lead in a best-of-seven. All 150 of the previous clubs finished the job. But the Celtics have made very clear that they have other ideas, and Mazzulla listed a lot of reasons why.

"Faith. Love. Togetherness. Physicality. Belief. Hope." Mazzulla said. "All those things combined. It starts with the locker room. Those guys had a choice to make and they chose to believe in each other."

Tip-ins

Celtics: The Celtics are 5-0 when facing elimination this season, 3-0 on the road. They beat Philadelphia twice on their way to erasing a 3-2 lead in the East finals, and now have tied this series. ... Malcolm Brogdon (right forearm strain) was downgraded to out about an hour before game time. ... White scored 11 for the Celtics, and Robert Williams III had 10.

Heat: Gabe Vincent scored 15, Duncan Robinson scored 13 and Bam Adebayo added 11 for Miami. ... Music star Diddy was at the game, as was former Heat guard Goran Dragic. ... Unless Miami wins Game 7 at Boston, it may have been the final home game of Heat forward Udonis Haslem's 20-year career. The Heat are 613-297 in the 910 games in their home arena with Haslem on the roster; that doesn't include the restart bubble's home games in 2020.

Game 7 history

The Celtics are 27-9 in Game 7s, winners of their last four — including one in Miami last season and one earlier this season, against Philadelphia in the East semifinals. They're 1-1 against the Heat all-time in such games (losing the 2012 East finals deciding game in Miami), and 22-5 at home in Game 7.

The Heat are 6-5 all-time in Game 7s, losing their last two (home vs Boston in 2022, at Toronto in 2016), and are 0-2 when facing such a game on the road. Besides the loss to Raptors seven years ago, they lost a Game 7 at Atlanta in 2009.

TENNIS

Djokovic driven by title record as history beckons

PARIS — For quite some time, Novak Djokovic has made his long-term goal clear: He wanted to focus on accumulating Grand Slam titles in order to surpass the totals of Rafael Nadal and Roger Federer.

As the French Open started on Sunday without either Nadal (who is injured) or Federer (who is retired) for the first time since 1998, Djokovic finally gets the chance to lead the career standings alone with a men's-record 23 Grand Slam titles. If he winds up with the championship two weeks from now, Djokovic would break a tie with Nadal and have three more trophies than Federer finished with.

"It's no secret that one of the main reasons I play today and compete in professional tennis is to try to break more records and make more history in tennis," Djokovic said Saturday. "That's extremely motivating and inspiring for me."

His current collection of 22 majors — two at Roland Garros, in 2016 and 2021; three at the US Open; seven at Wimbledon and 10 at the Australian Open, including this January — means he owns 16 more than the other 127 men in the bracket in Paris combined. Stan Wawrinka won three, while Carlos Alcaraz, Daniil Medvedev and Dominic Thiem have one apiece.

"Grand Slams are a different tournament, a different sport, in a way, because you're playing best-of-five (sets), you are playing in the most important tournaments in the world," said the 36-year-old Djokovic, "and the experience is on my side."

It's why when other players are asked who enters as the favorite in Nadal's absence, they often mention two names: Alcaraz, who is ranked No 1 and is 20-2 with a tour-high three titles on clay in 2023, and Djokovic, who is just 5-3 this season on the surface used at the French Open.

Why point to Djokovic?

"Because Novak has won so many times," said Casper Ruud, the runner-up to Nadal at Roland Garros and to Alcaraz at the US Open last year. "This year's clay season has been maybe not what he expected, but I'm sure he has good confidence in himself."

Djokovic pronounced the 20-year-old Alcaraz as "the biggest favorite", citing "the last few months, and the kind of shape and the form that he's having — and that I'm having".

The world No 3 could meet Alcaraz only in the semifinals.

Djokovic was in contemplative mood on the eve of the event, explaining how much harder things are on his body at this age and that he views each Slam tournament he competes in nowadays "like a present".

Asked about Nadal, the 14-time champion in Paris who has been sidelined since January with a hip injury, he replied: "He's my biggest rival. When he announced that he's (probably) going to have his last season of his career (in 2024), I felt part of me is leaving with him, too, if you know what I mean," Djokovic said.

"I feel that he was one of the most, I would say, impactful people that I have ever had in my career, the growth of my career, and me as a player. Definitely a great motivational factor for me to keep playing and keep competing and keep pushing each other," Djokovic continued. "Who's going to achieve more? Who's going to do better? It made me wonder. It made me think about my career and how long I'm going to play."

And then he paused and smiled before delivering this line, perhaps for clarity's sake, perhaps for the laughs he knew it would bring: "I'm not going to make any announcement today."*